BIG COMIC SUPERIOR

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BECAUSE OF THE SWORD

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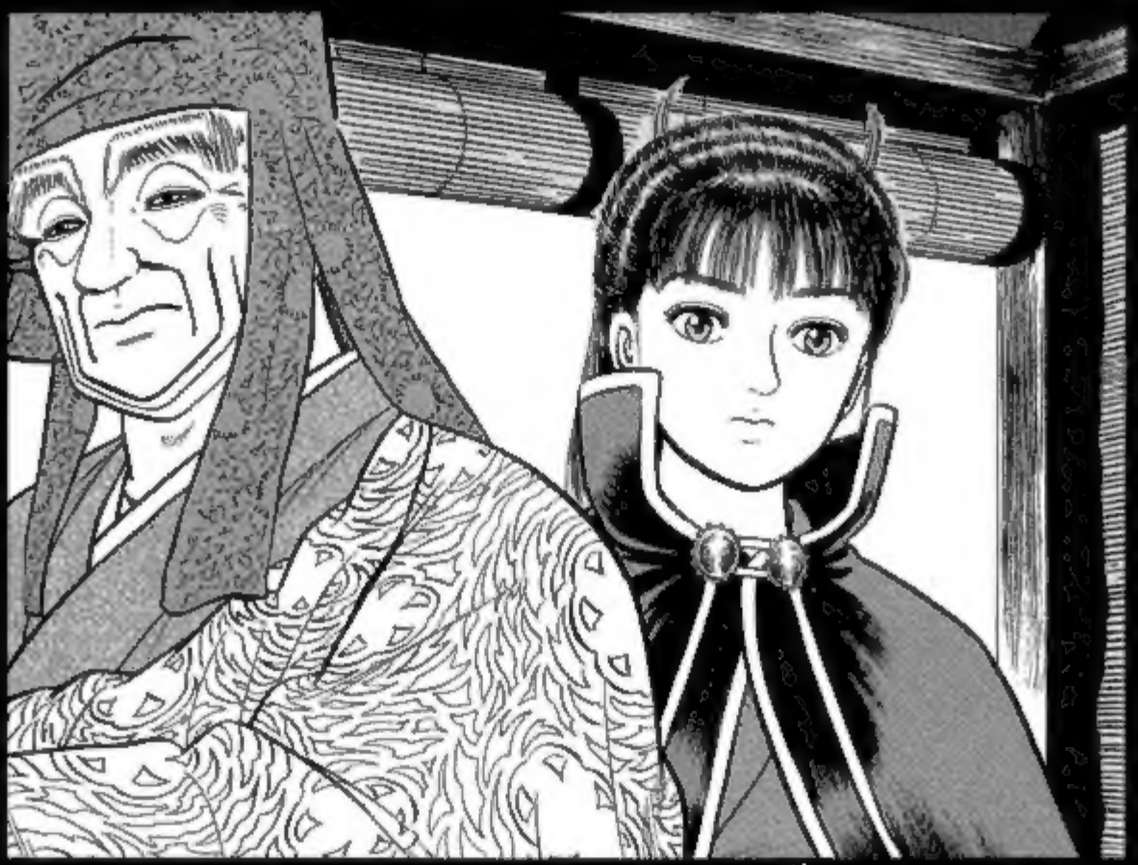

Azumi

18. Because Of The Sword

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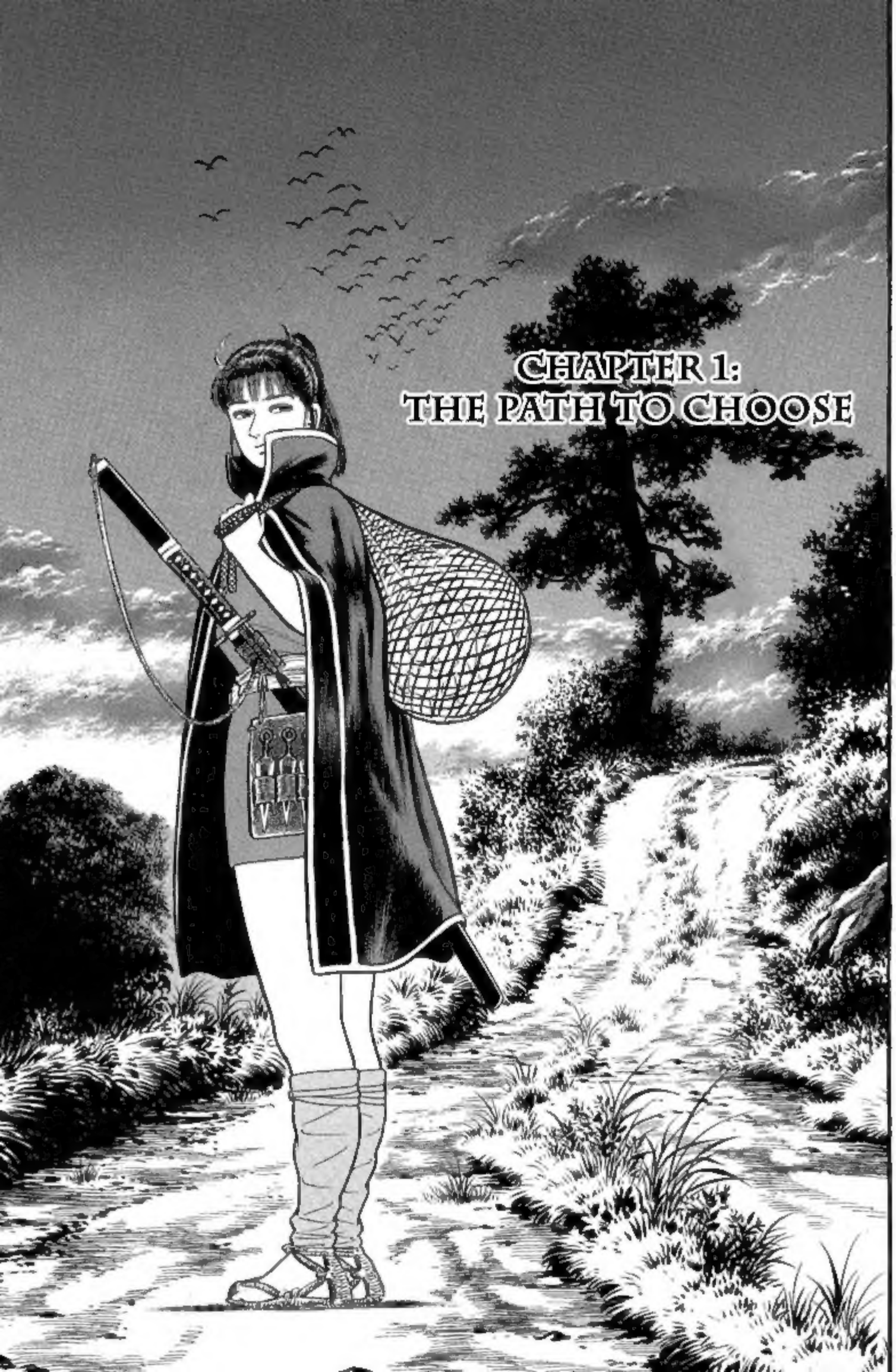
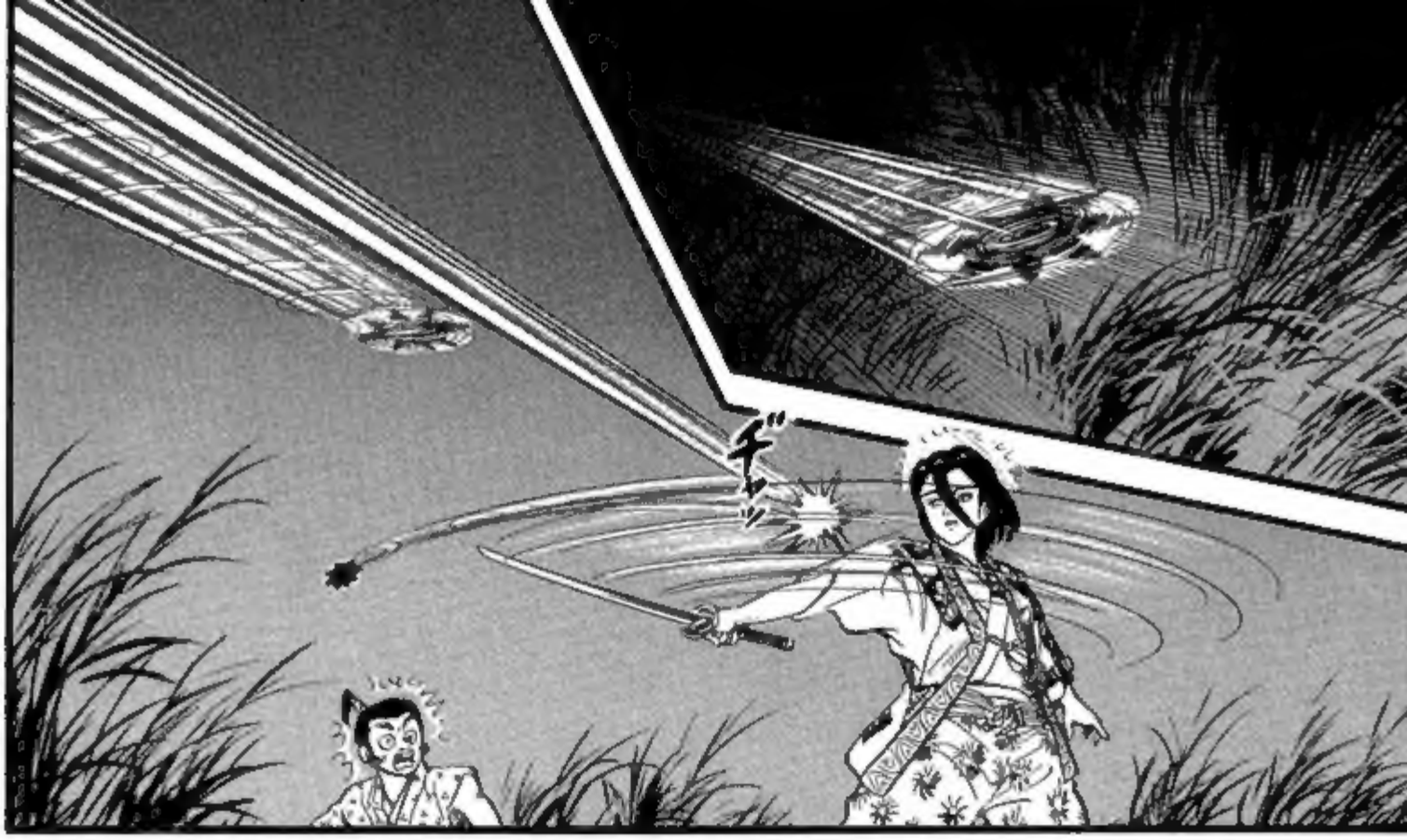

CHAPTER 1:
THE PATH TO CHOOSE

2

Y- YES.
HURRY UP AND STOP THE BLOOD!!
WHAT'RE YOU DOING!?
QUICK, KILL THAT BIIITCH!! GOD DAMMIIIT!!
Ouwoo!
おうぅぅぅぅ
rattle rattle
ビリビリ
Shiiit!
SHE ...
YES.

WE CAN'T LET HER LIVE.
FOR A FENCER.
TOOK AWAY YOUR FINGERS... THAT ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANY-THING...

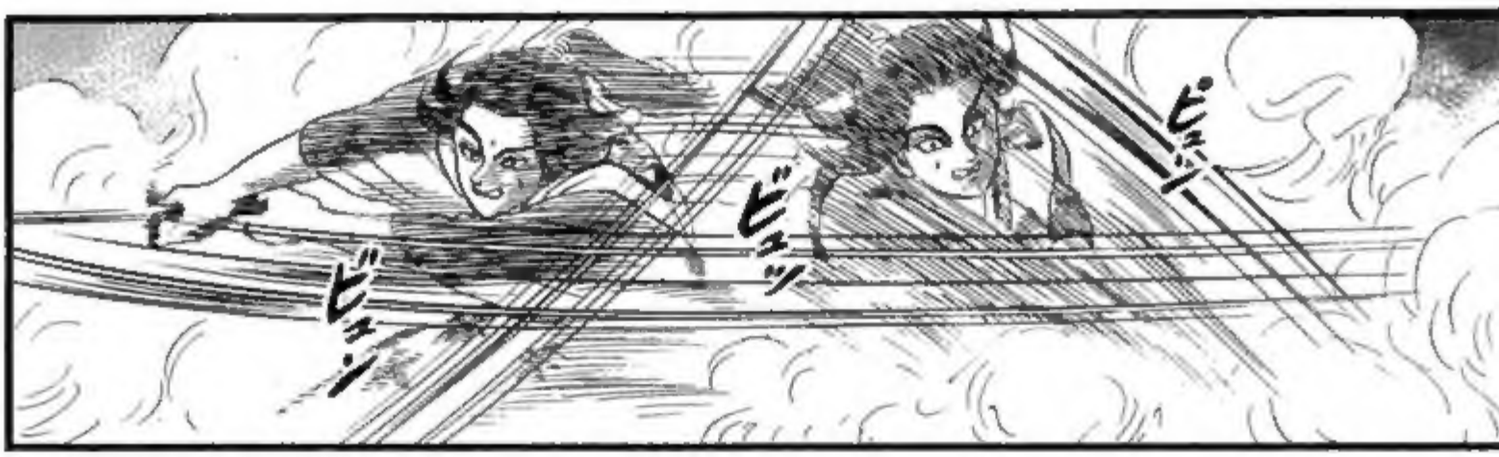


4

ボッ
ボッ

BAS-
TARD!!

YOU SWIIINE!!
ガサ
ガササッ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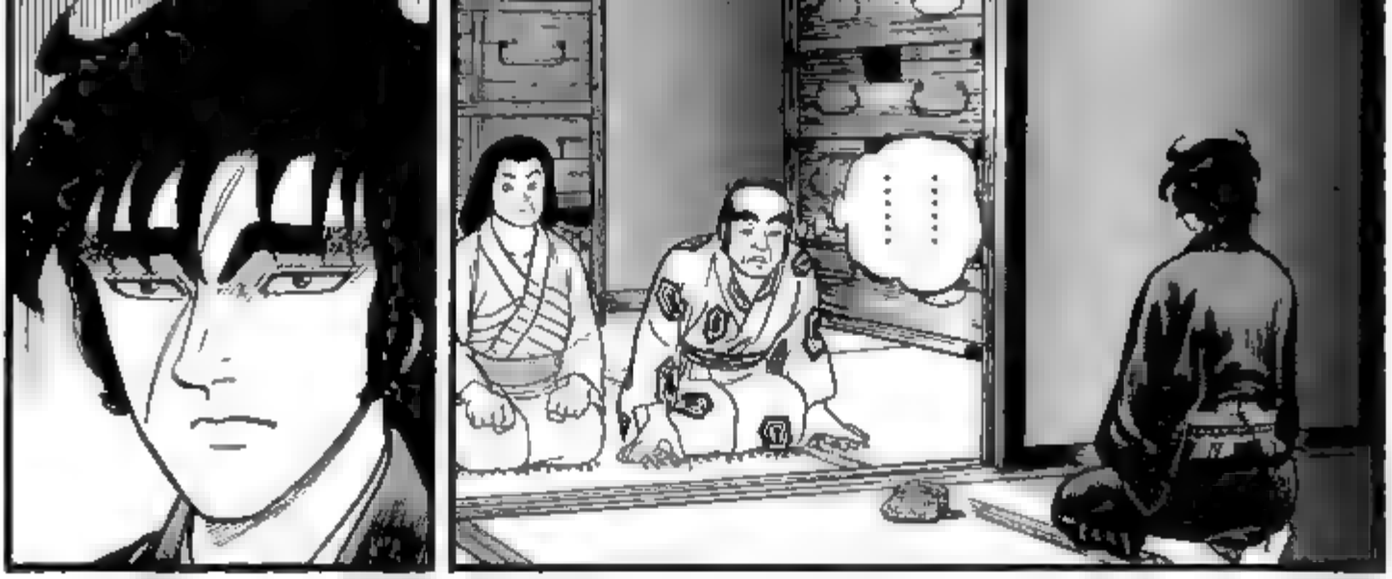
SHE WAS TAKEN AWAY BY A SHINOBI...
AH!! AZUMI'S GONE!!
GH...
M-MY PREY...
A-AZU-MI...

I HAD ARRIVED EARLIER.
THANK GOODNESS
WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU, AZUMI!?
THAT'S NOT LIKE YOU AT ALL...

DEED.
TO ADD THIS TO HER DEBT REPAYMENT
BUT I WANT YOU
THIS MONEY ISN'T ENOUGH TO REDEEM SAYO,



IMME-
DIATELY
...
YES.
REMAINING
DEBT IS
AND HAND
IT OVER.
THEN,
I WANT
YOU TO
WRITE ON
THE DEED
HOW
MUCH
HER

NISHIDA-DONO!!
AH!!

THE ONE WHO KILLED THAT PERSON WAS THIS MAN, BUT.....
WHAT!?

AL-
READY
DEAD...
HE'S...
ガヤ
ガヤ
ガヤ

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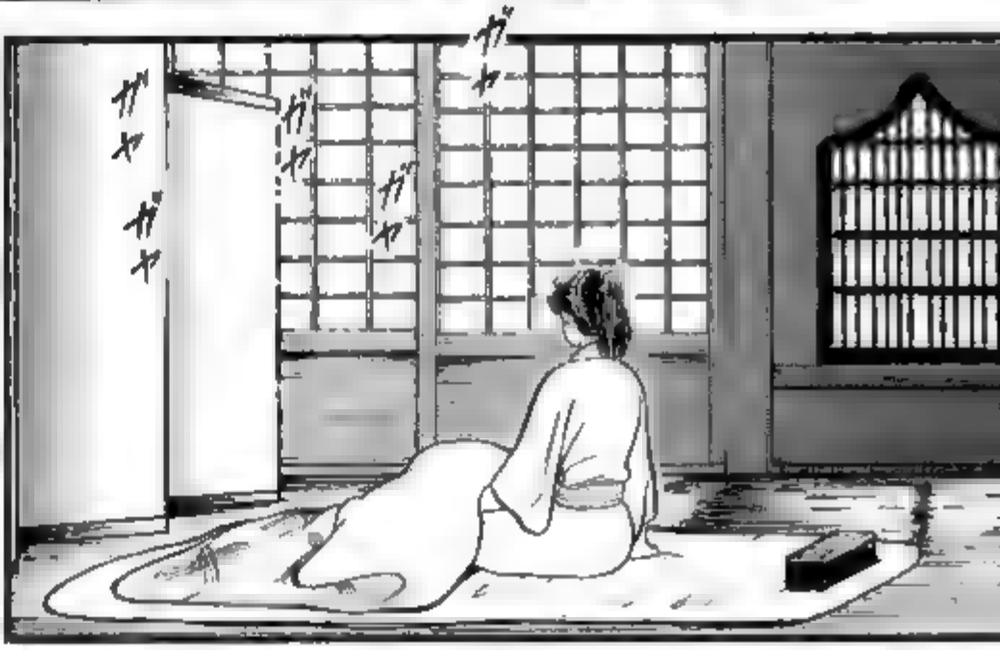
……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ガヤ

ARE YOU AWAKE, AZUMI...?
UUUH...
LAST NIGHT...
……

LONG TIME NO SEE.
T-TOBI-ZARU-DONO!!
LET'S SAY THAT WITH THIS, WE'RE EVEN!!
.....
BROUGHT ME TO THIS TEMPLE...
TOBI-ZARU-DONO ...

NI-SHIDA-DONO...
.....
.....
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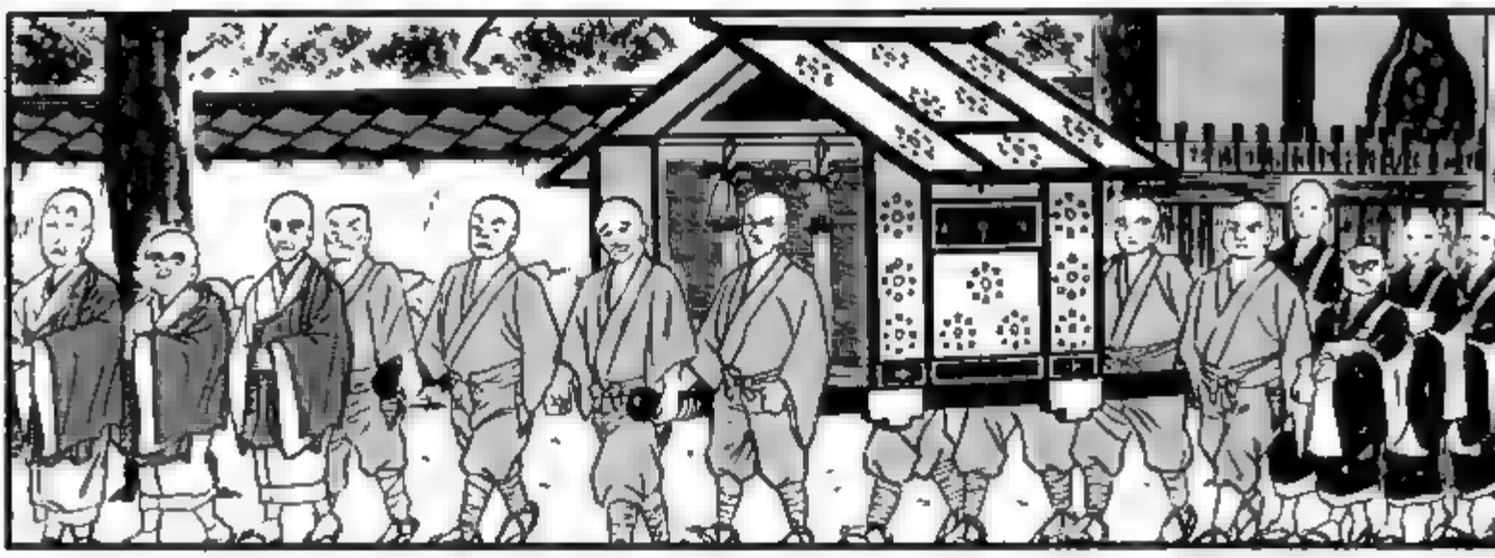
HE'S ARRIVED!!
OOH!!
AH!! THEY'RE HERE!!



AAAH, HEAVEN BE PRAISED!
HE'S HERE!!

I SINCERELY APOLOGIZE. THEY HEARD ABOUT IT ELSEWHERE, SO MONKS FROM MANY DIFFERENT TEMPLES...AND EVEN THE LOCAL DAIMYŌ CAME RUSHING HERE...
WANTING TO CATCH EVEN JUST A GLIMPSE OF THE SŌJŌ-SAMA...
MORE IMPORTANTLY, THAT PERSON HAS BEEN PROTECTED ADEQUATELY, RIGHT!?

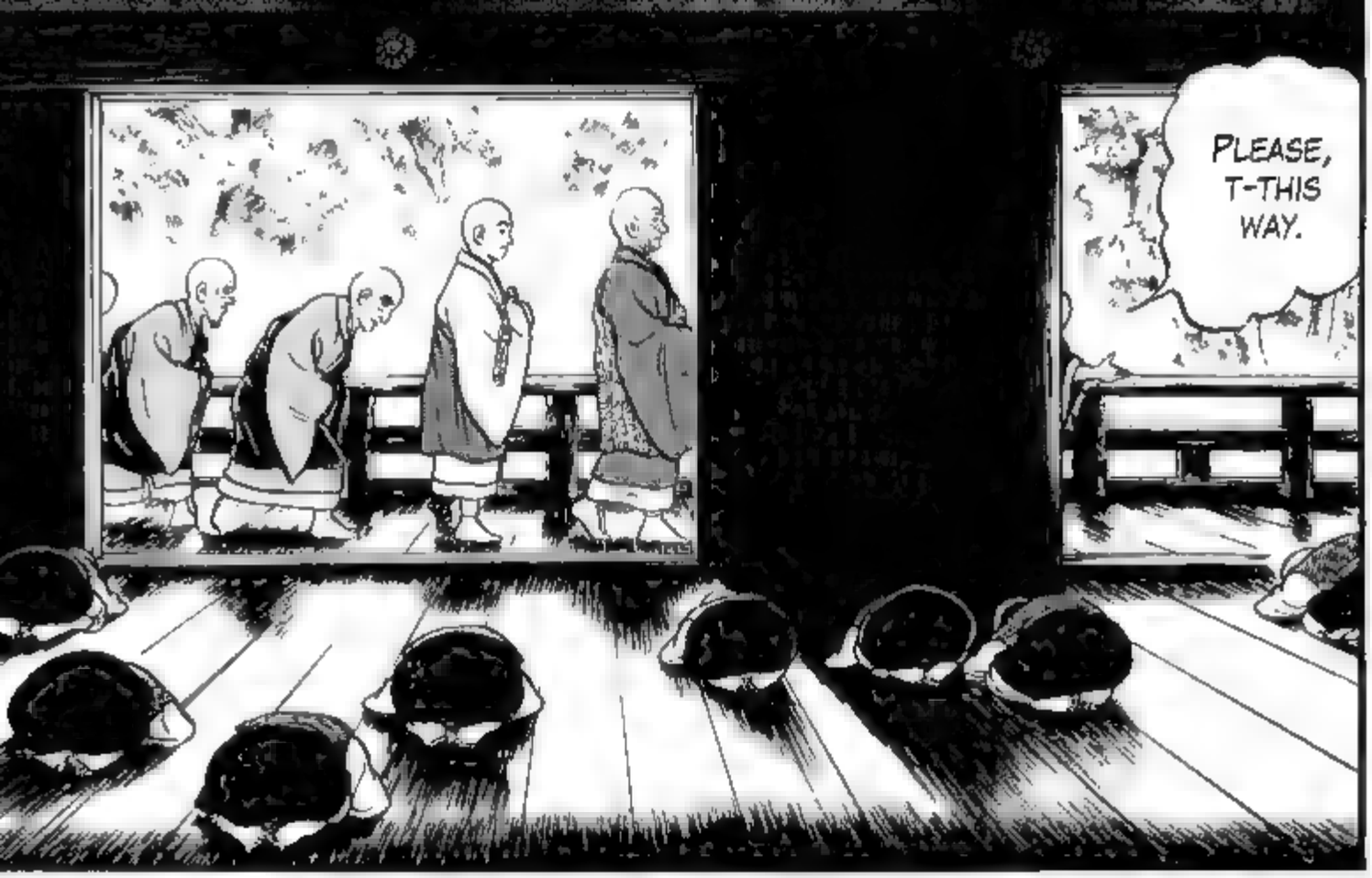
THE SŌJŌ-SAMA WILL MEET THAT PERSON FIRST THINGS FIRST.
Y-YES, SHE'S INSIDE...
HUH!?

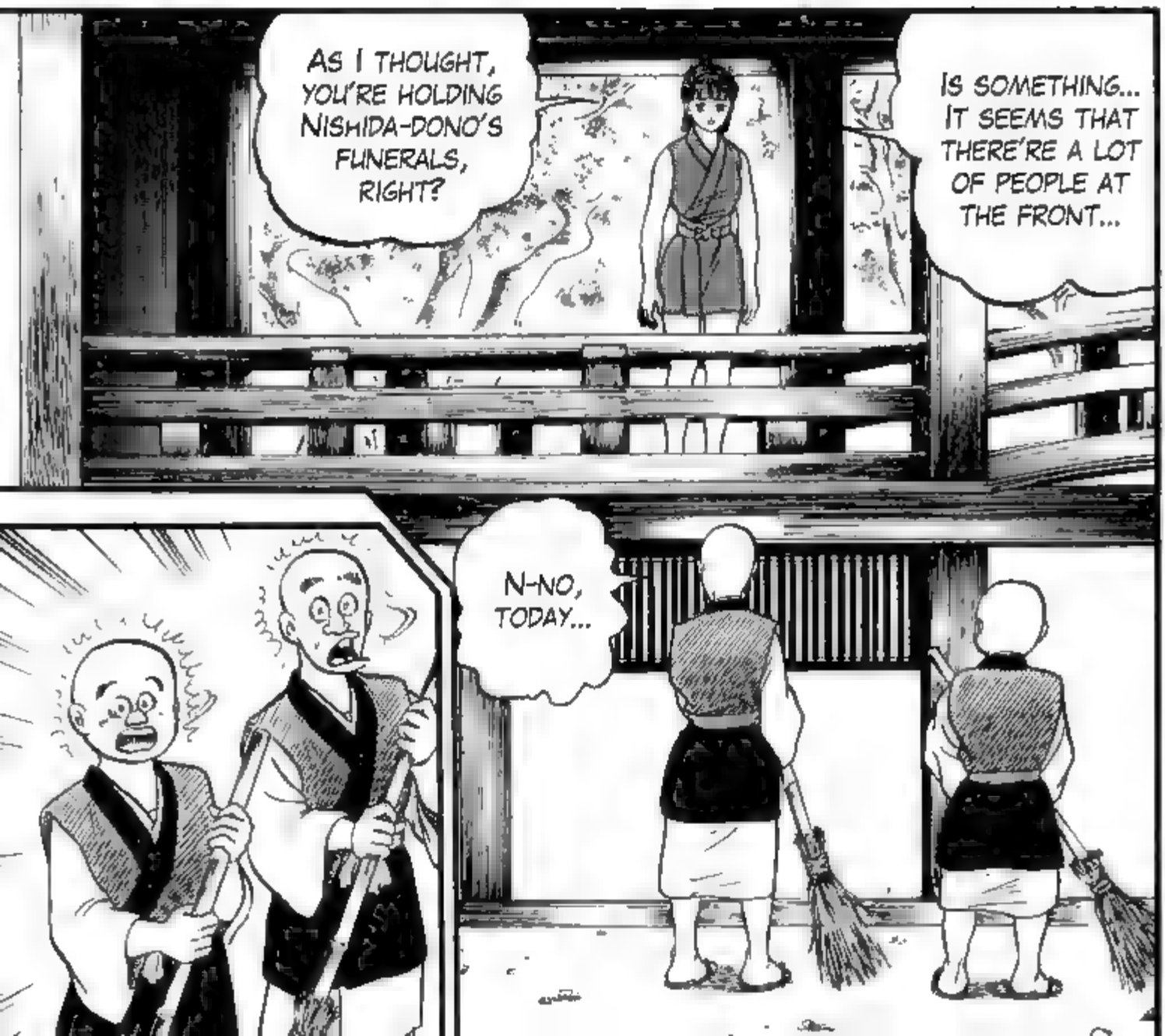
HE SAID THAT HE WON'T RECEIVE ANYONE ELSE WITH NO EXCEPTION UNTIL HE'S FINISHED TALKING TO THAT PERSON.
MAKE EVERYONE WAIT!

Nankōbō Tenkai

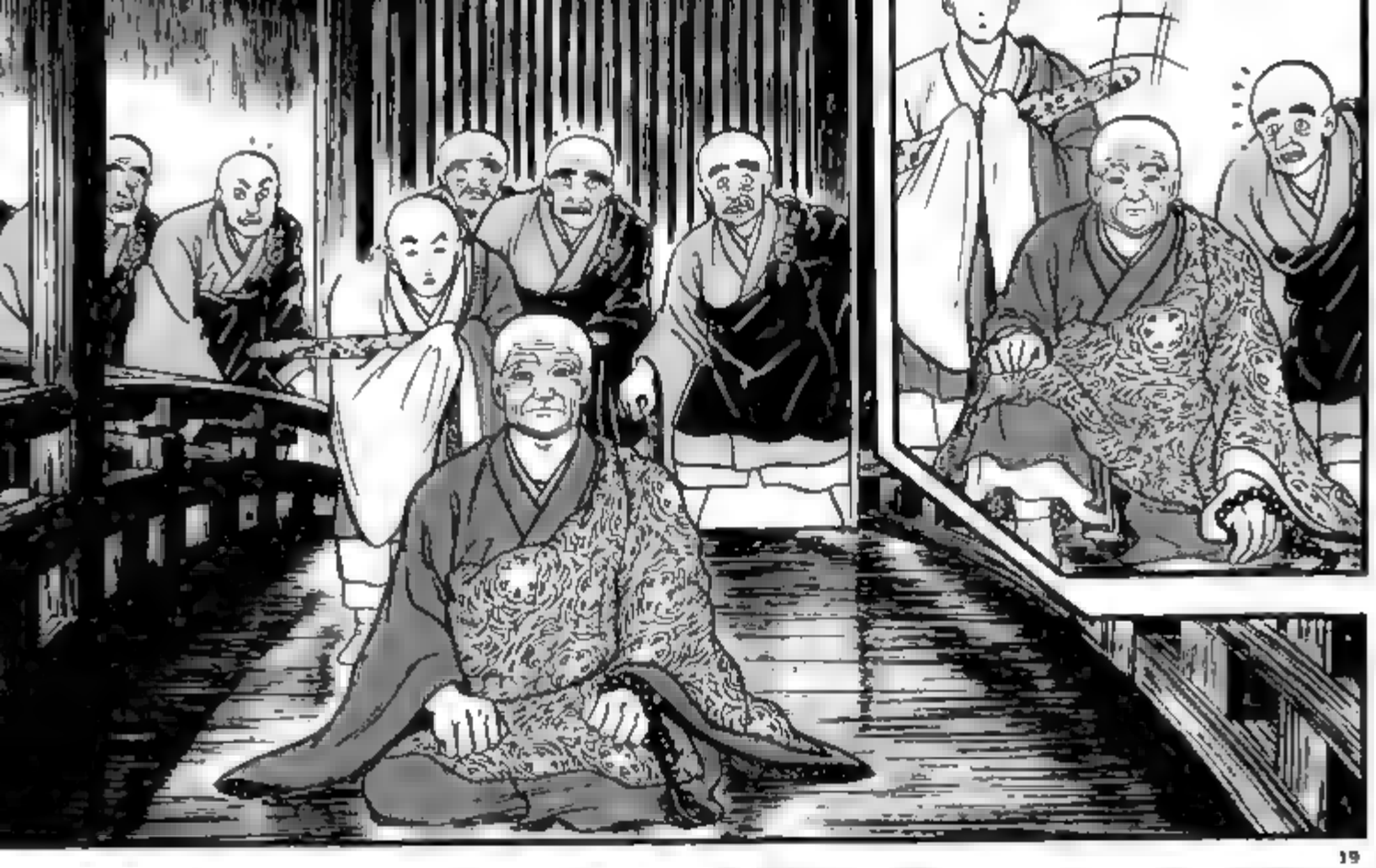
HE'S COMING HERE!!
AAAH!!

COMING SUDDENLY HERE...


PLEASE, T-THIS WAY.


AS I THOUGHT, YOU'RE HOLDING NISHIDA-DONO'S FUNERALS, RIGHT?
IS SOMETHING... IT SEEMS THAT THERE'RE A LOT OF PEOPLE AT THE FRONT...
N-NO, TODAY...

ARE YOU AZUMI?
YES...
.....

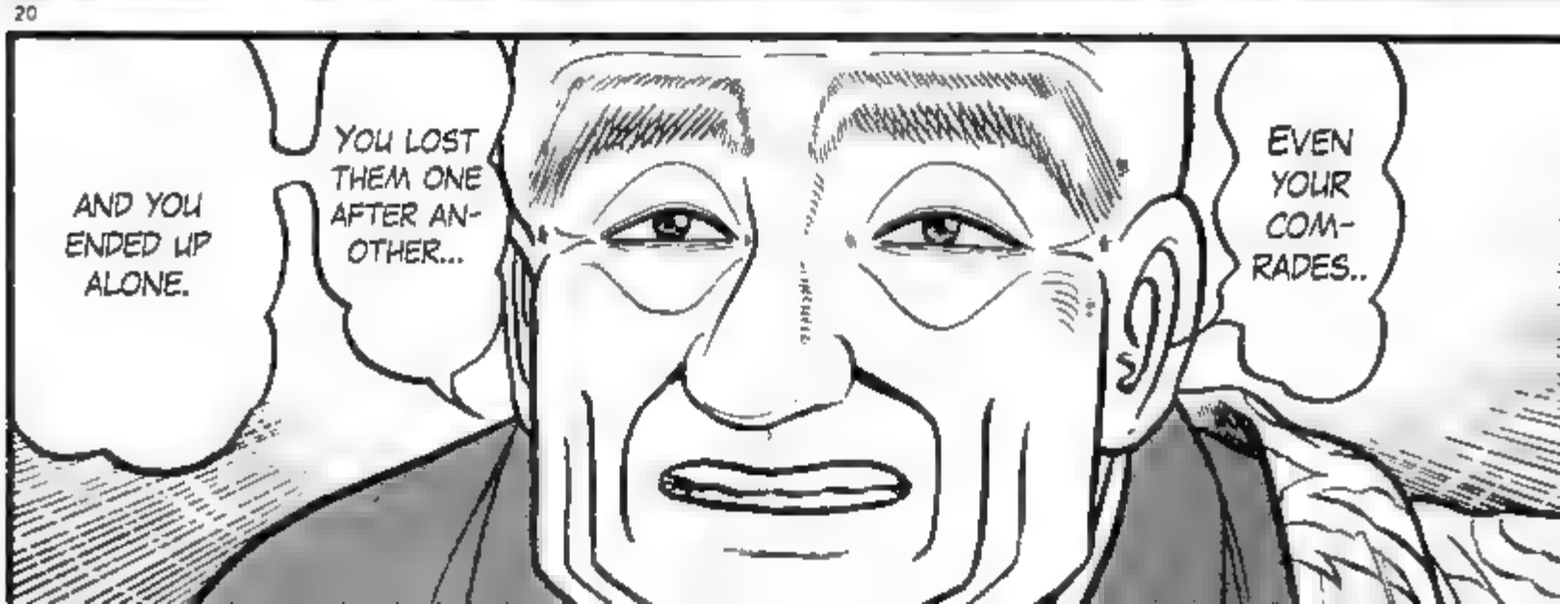


W-
WHY!?
WHO
ARE
YOU!?

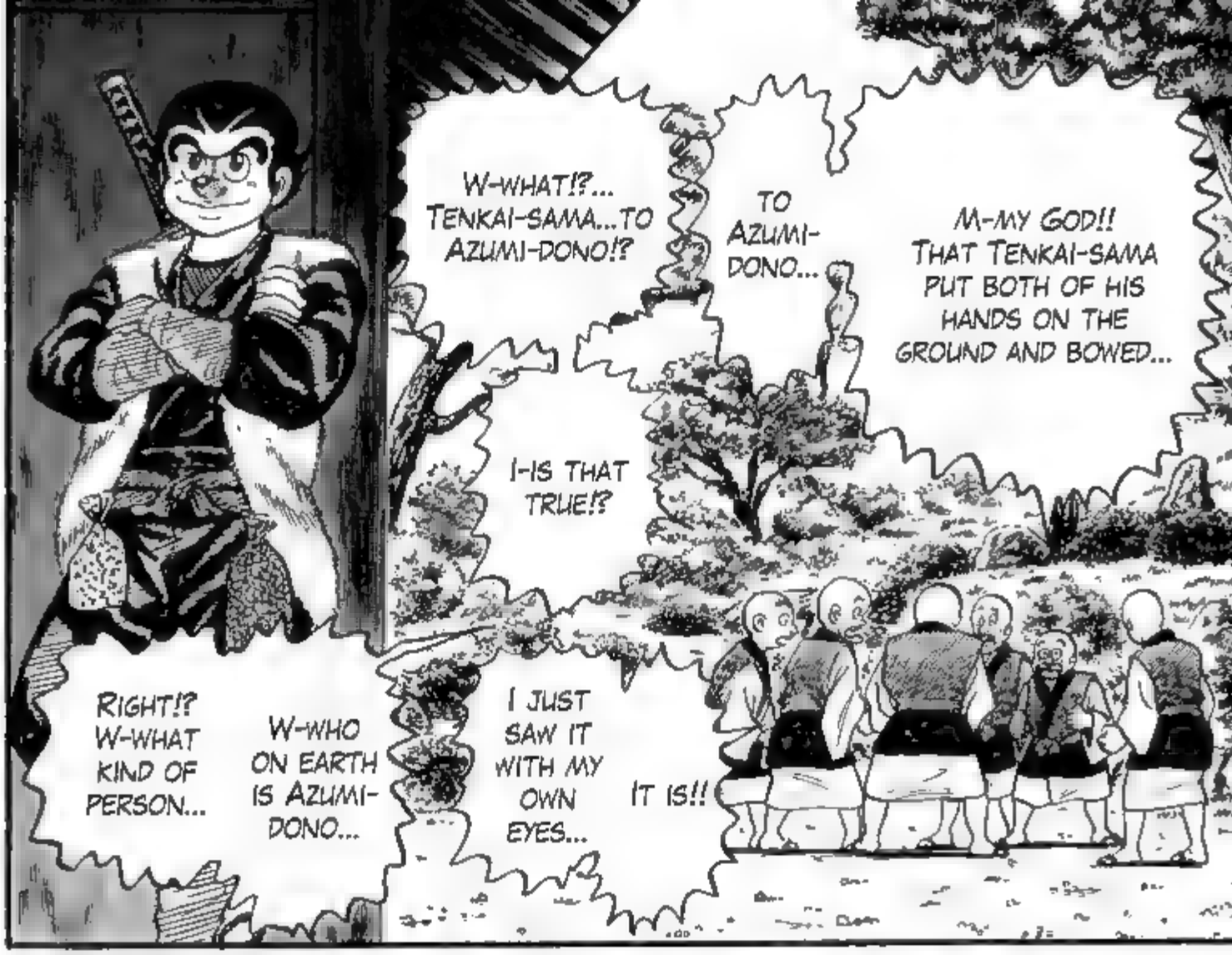
FOR A LONG TIME...
I COULDN'T REACH YOU
I'M SORRY
IT'S BEEN TOUGH, RIGHT?
YOU'VE BEEN LONELY, RIGHT?

GRAM-PA!!
EH!?

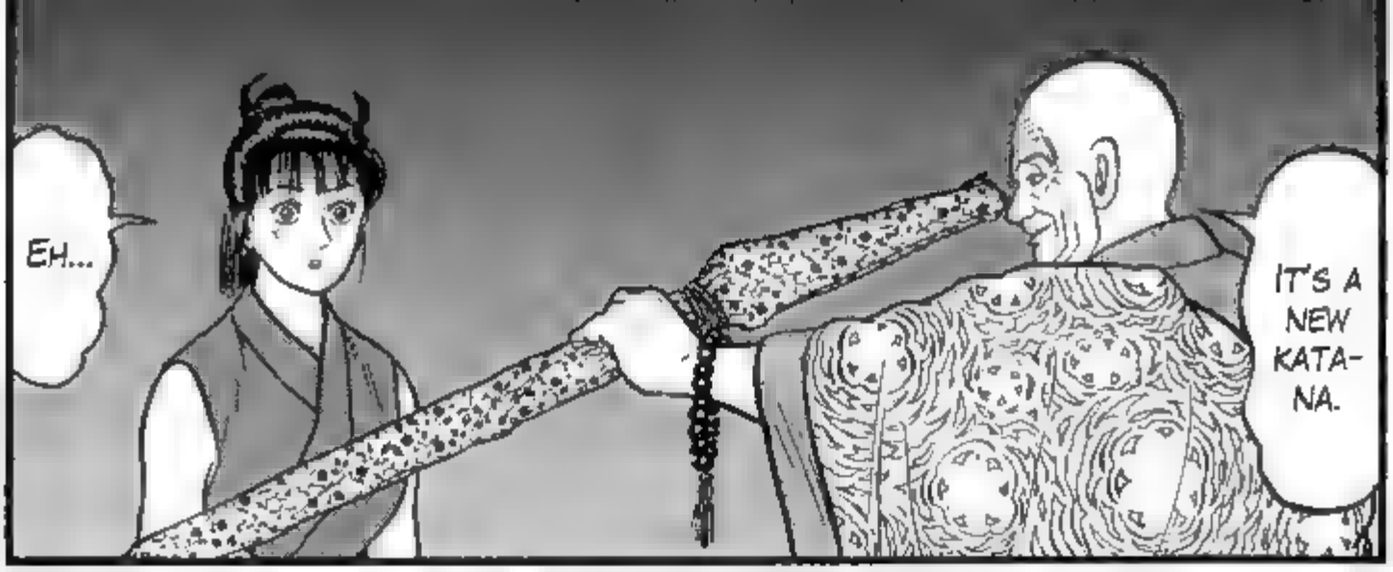
I CAME TO KNOW ABOUT GESSAI'S DEATH TOO LATE...


AND YOU ENDED UP ALONE.
YOU LOST THEM ONE AFTER AN-OTHER...
EVEN YOUR COM-RADES..

!!.....
WHY DOES THIS MONK ...
KNOW ABOUT THAT ...!?


W-WHAT!?... TENKAI-SAMA...TO AZUMI-DONO!?
TO AZUMI-DONO...
M-MY GOD!! THAT TENKAI-SAMA PUT BOTH OF HIS HANDS ON THE GROUND AND BOWED...
I-IS THAT TRUE!?
RIGHT!? W-WHAT KIND OF PERSON...
W-WHO ON EARTH IS AZUMI-DONO...
I JUST SAW IT WITH MY OWN EYES...
IT IS!!

AZUMI, I'VE SOMETHING TO GIVE YOU.


EH...
IT'S A NEW KATA-NA.

.....
YOU'VE BEEN USING YOURS A LOT UNTIL NOW. IT SHOULD HAVE KNICKS...

LAST NIGHT.
IT BROKE

SO, YOU BOUGHT A DIFFERENT TYPE OF KATANA THAT YOU AREN'T ACCUSTOMED TO USING?
WHAT !!

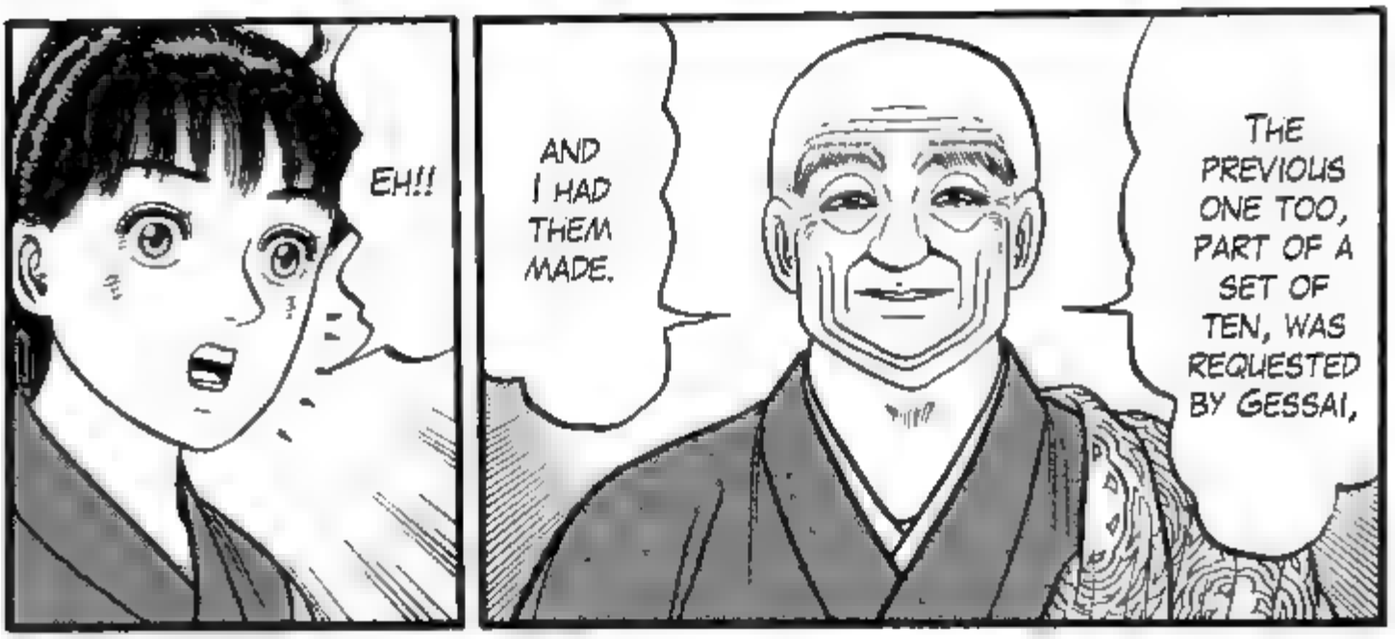
IT BROKE.

WELL, REALLY...
HAH HAH HA HA HA!

PFF ...
OH MY...

WHAT !!... LAST NIGHT ...

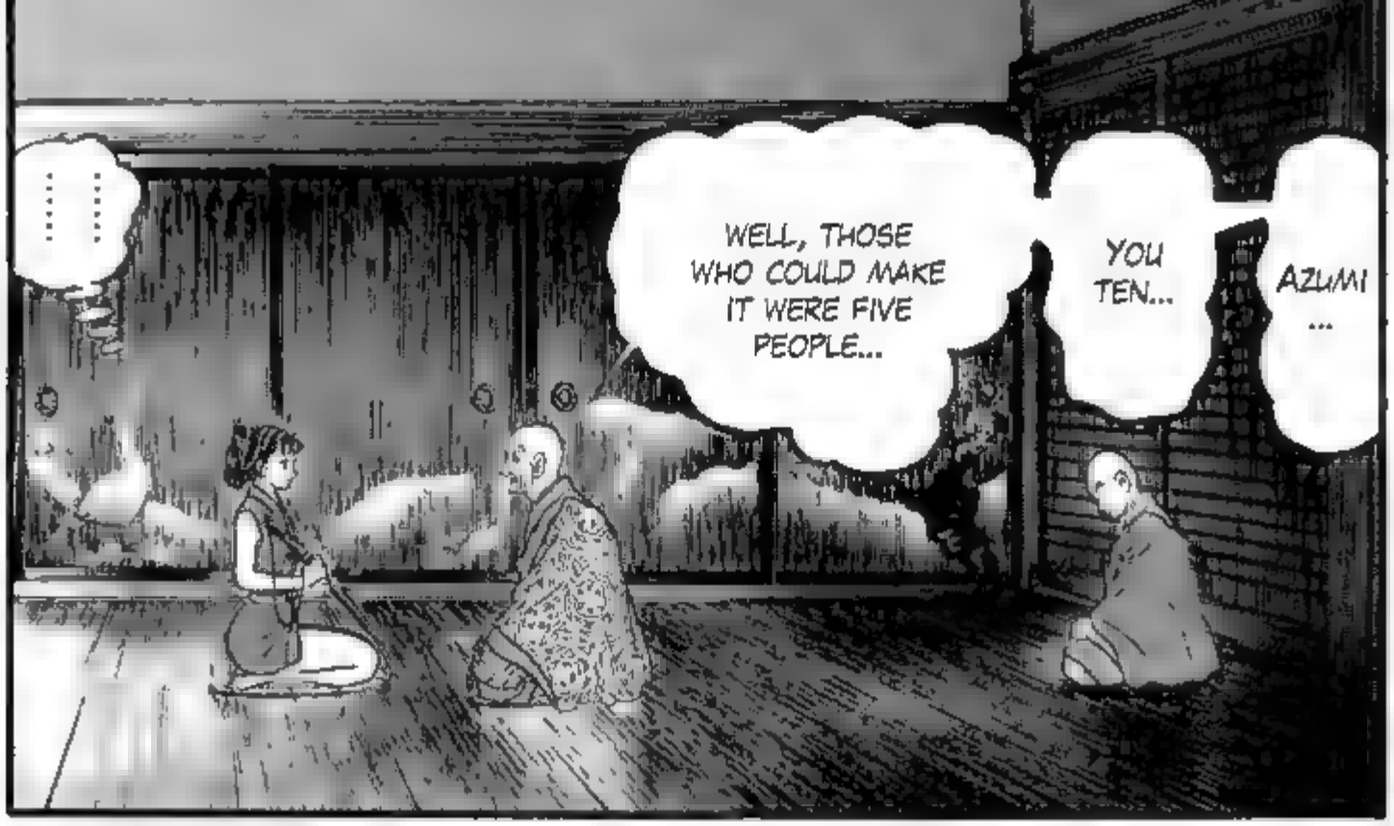
AAAAH!! IT'S THE SAME
AS MY KATANA ...!!
WHY ...!?


EH!!
AND I HAD THEM MADE.
THE PREVIOUS ONE TOO, PART OF A SET OF TEN, WAS REQUESTED BY GESSAI,

YOUR DUAL BLADE KATANA WAS IMPRESSIVE AS WELL... I REMEBER IT VIVIDLY.
THE TRUTH IS THAT HE WROTE DOWN A DETAILED REQUEST FOR EACH OF YOUR TEN SWORDS...

ALL THOSE... KATANA WERE...
EVERY-ONE'S KATANA ...

BY THE BEST SWORDSMITH IN ALL THE LAND!!!
I HAD IT MADE THE SAME
SINCE I STILL HAD THAT WRITTEN REQUEST IN MY POSSES-SION...

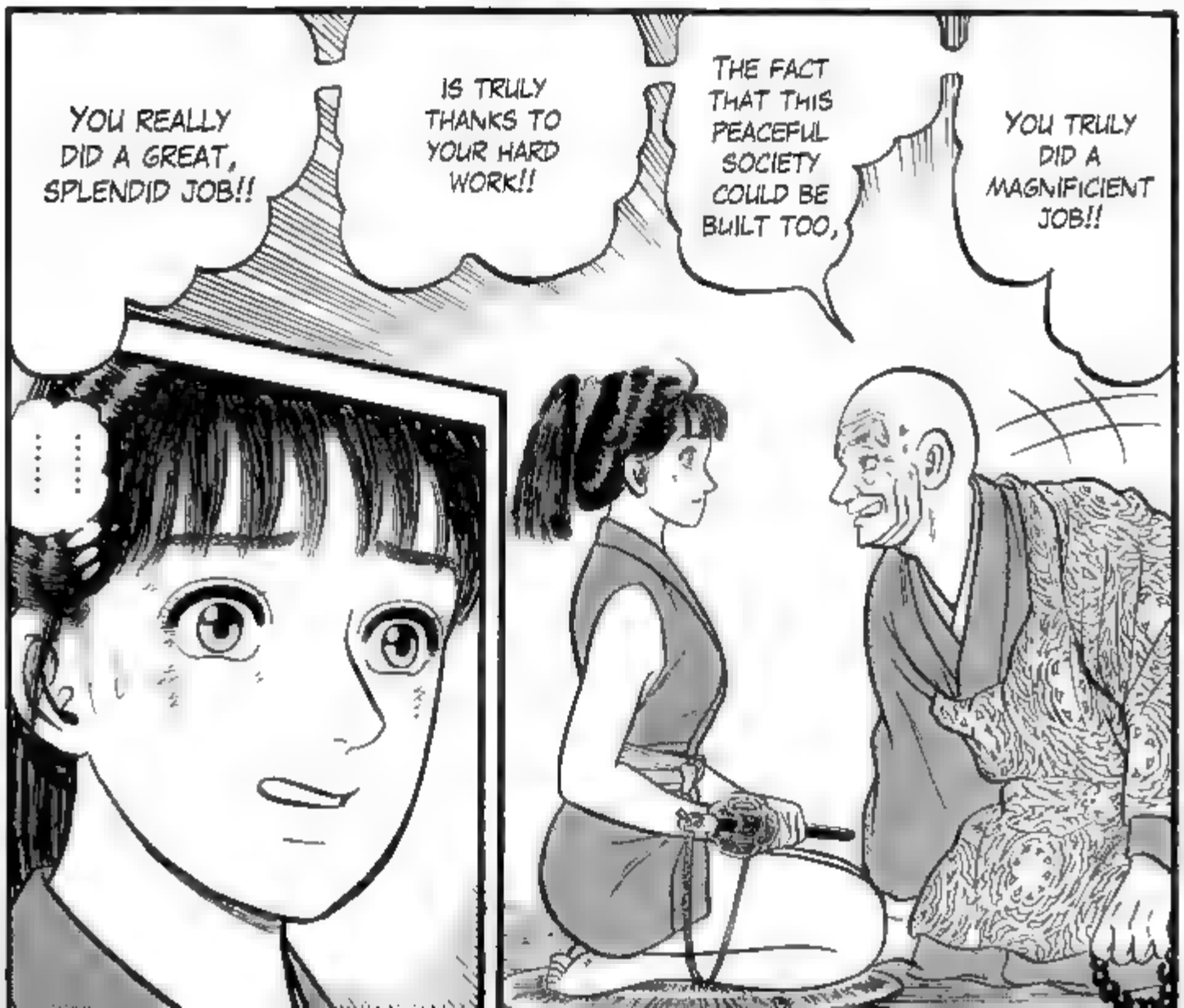

AZUMI ...
YOU TEN...
WELL, THOSE WHO COULD MAKE IT WERE FIVE PEOPLE...
.....

YOU FIVE REALLY ACCOMPLISHED GREAT THINGS...
FIRST...
KATAGIRI HYŌBU WHO PLANNED AN UPRISING WITH MORE THAN SIXTY SOLDIERS...

THEN...THOSE WHO WOULD'VE LEAD TO A GREAT WAR THAT WOULD'VE SPLIT THE COUNTRY INTO TWO SIDES JUST LIKE AT SEKIGAHARA...
ASANO KIYO-MASA,
SA-NADA MASA-YUKI AND
KATŌ KIYO-MASA.

THEN, THE GENIUS TACTICIAN OF THE TOYOTOMI FACTION, OTSUKA HYŌE.

IF YOU HADN'T PRUNED THOSE BRANCHES...
THE COUNTRY WOULD'VE REVERTED BACK TO A LAND OF WAR THAT WOULD'VE REPEATED THE SAME STRUGGLES FOR THOSE SEEKING TO RULE...
HOW MANY TENS OF THOU-SANDS
OF LIVES WOULD'VE BEEN LOST IN SUCH A CHAOTIC LAND...?


YOU TRULY DID A MAGNIFICIENT JOB!!
THE FACT THAT THIS PEACEFUL SOCIETY COULD BE BUILT TOO,
IS TRULY THANKS TO YOUR HARD WORK!!
YOU REALLY DID A GREAT, SPLENDID JOB!!
.....

THANK YOU, AZUMI!!
FOR A PEACEFUL COUNTRY,
YOU RISKED YOUR YOUNG LIFE!!
WELL DONE!!

.....

WELL DONE!!

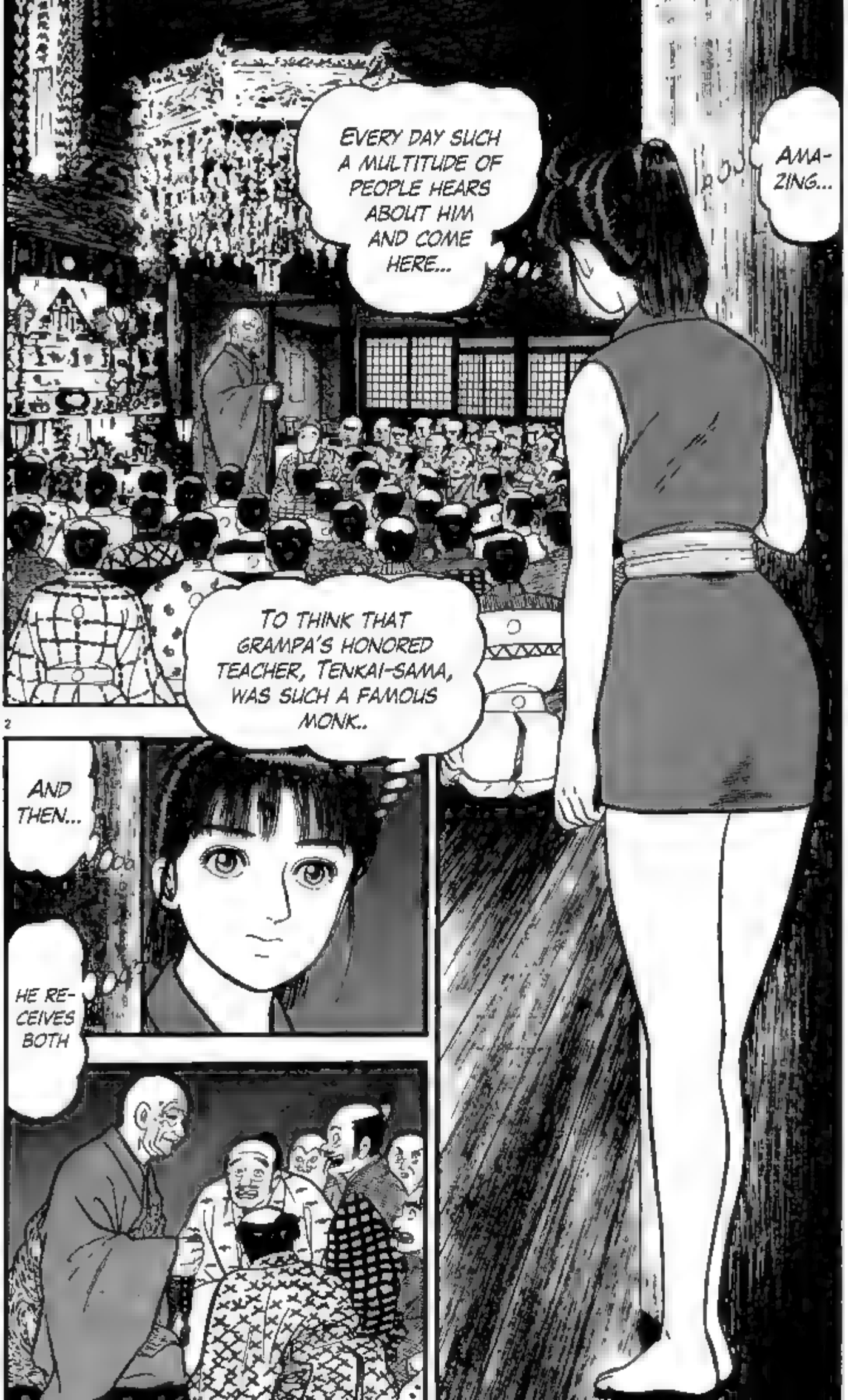
I AM TRULY SORRY!
AND THOUGH YOU DID ALL OF THAT... I WAS SO LATE TO COME AND GIVE YOU MY PROTECTION...

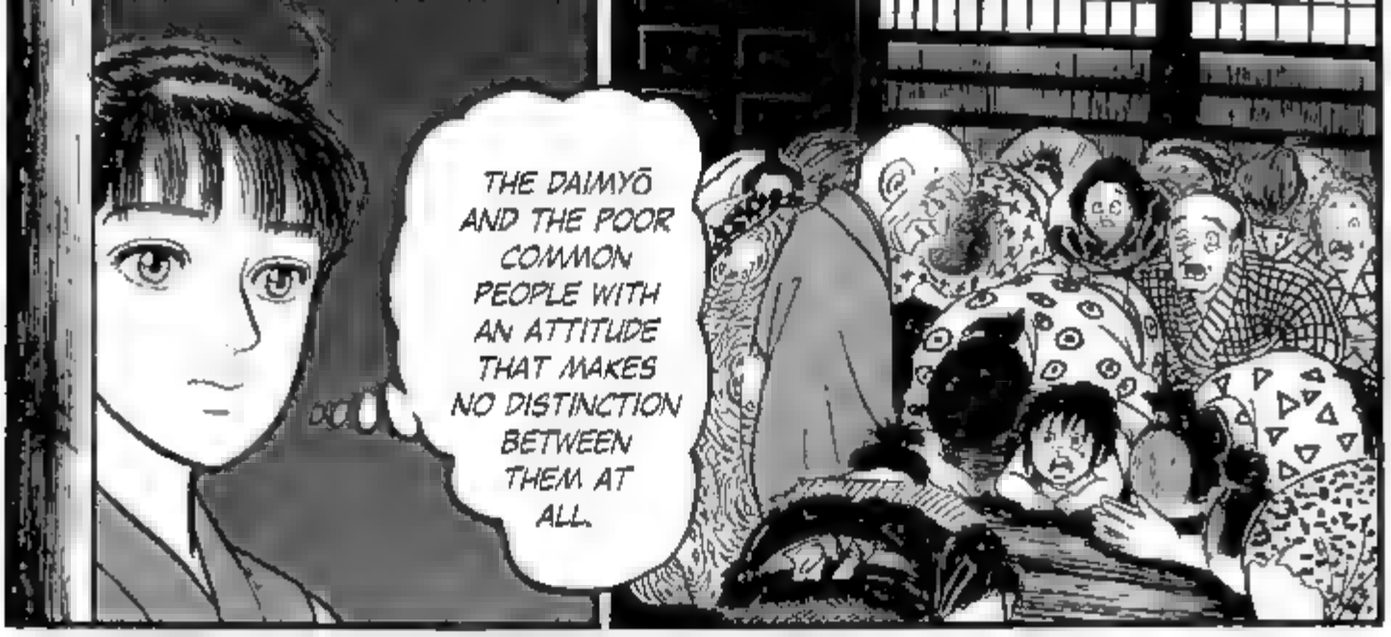
YOU WON'T BE LONELY ANYMORE!!
I WON'T ALLOW YOU TO HAVE ANY SAD MEMORIES FROM THIS DAY FORTH, AZUMI!!

30

T-THIS PERSON... REMINDS ME...
OF GRAM-PA...

CHAPTER 2: TEARS


AMA-ZING...
EVERY DAY SUCH A MULTITUDE OF PEOPLE HEARS ABOUT HIM AND COME HERE...
TO THINK THAT GRAMPA'S HONORED TEACHER, TENKAI-SAMA, WAS SUCH A FAMOUS MONK..
2
AND THEN...
HE RE-CEIVES BOTH

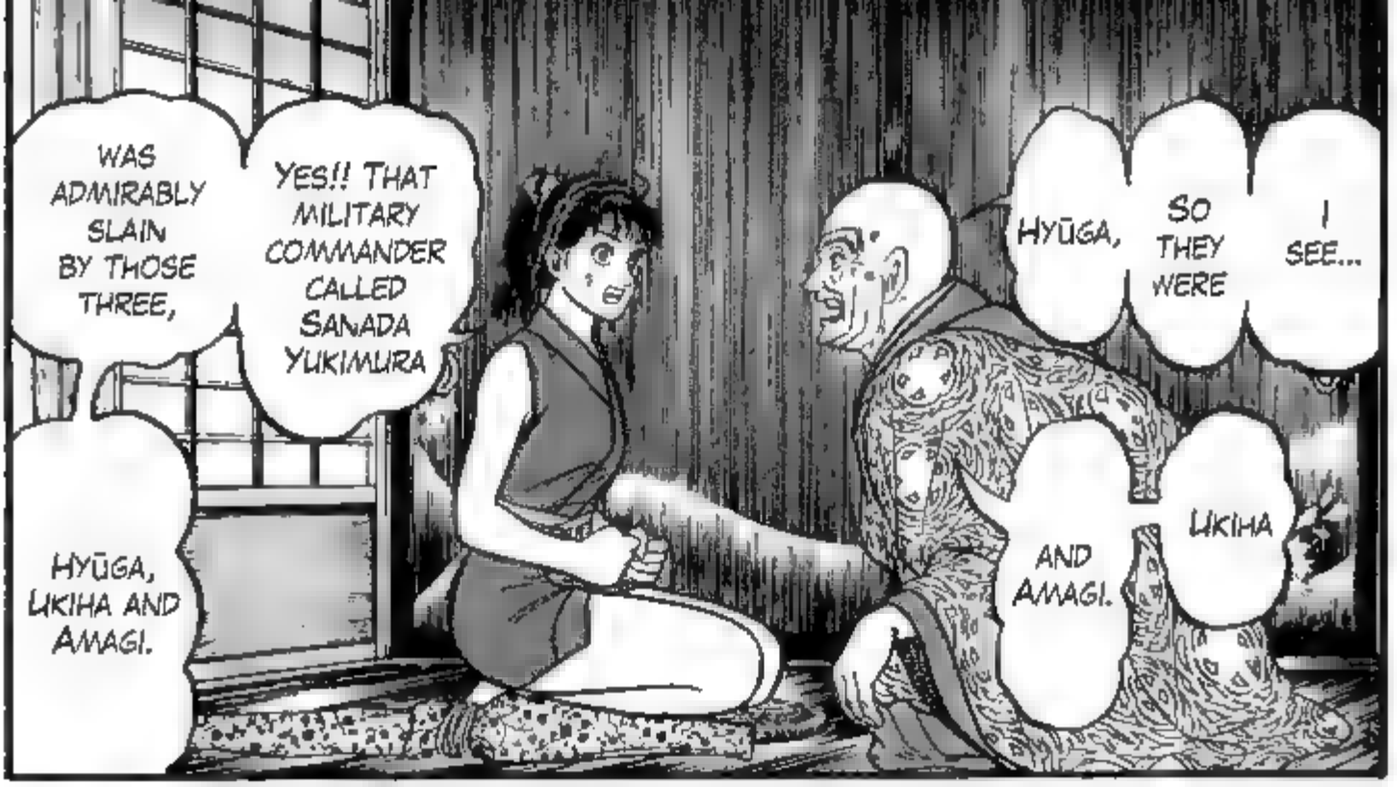

THE DAIMYŌ AND THE POOR COMMON PEOPLE WITH AN ATTITUDE THAT MAKES NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN THEM AT ALL.

.....

3

.....
INSIDE THIS SEAL CASE, THERE'S A BODHISATTVA IMAGE CARVED BY A CERTAIN HIGH PRIEST.

A SEAL CASE I GAVE TO GESSAI A LONG, LONG TIME AGO...
THIS IS...
GES-SAI...
.....
GES-SAI!!
OOH!!
.....
GES-SAI...
4
ARE YOU WATCH-ING!?
GRAM-PA...
I MET WITH YOUR HONORED TEACHER...


WAS ADMIRABLY SLAIN BY THOSE THREE,
YES!! THAT MILITARY COMMANDER CALLED SANADA YUKIMURA
HYŪGA, UKIHA AND AMAGI.
HYŪGA,
SO THEY WERE
I SEE...
UKIHA AND AMAGI.

I SEE!!

I SEE.
NAGA-RA,

WAS VERY STRONG!!
NAGARA TOO, WHO DIED IN THE FIGHT AGAINST KATAGIRI HYŌBU'S GROUP,

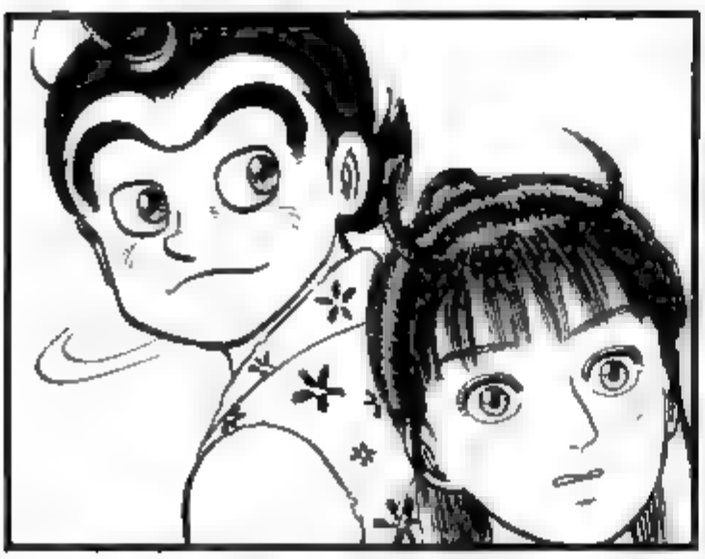
YOU FIVE HAVE CARRIED OUT SUCH VITAL MISSIONS FOR ME...
AZUMI, NAGARA,
AMAGI, UKIHA, HYUGA,

I SEE!!
THANK YOU!!
OUR ENEMIES CAME TO KNOW ABOUT OUR EXISTENCE AND SENT SO MANY ASSASSINS...
YES!!
BUT WE ALWAYS FOUGHT BY COMBINING OUR STRENGTH!!

.....
YOU FIVE, RISKING YOUR YOUNG LIVES, WORKED GREATLY AND MAGNIFICENTLY FOR THE COUNTRY!!

BUT OF COURSE!!
ADMI-RABLE, RIGHT?
EVERY-ONE WAS

THEY ENDED A WORLD OF DISORDER THAT THREW THE COUNTRY INTO CHAOS AND THEY EVEN BUILT A PEACEFUL SOCIETY LIKE THIS ONE.
THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH WORDS OF PRAISE FOR ALL OF THEM...

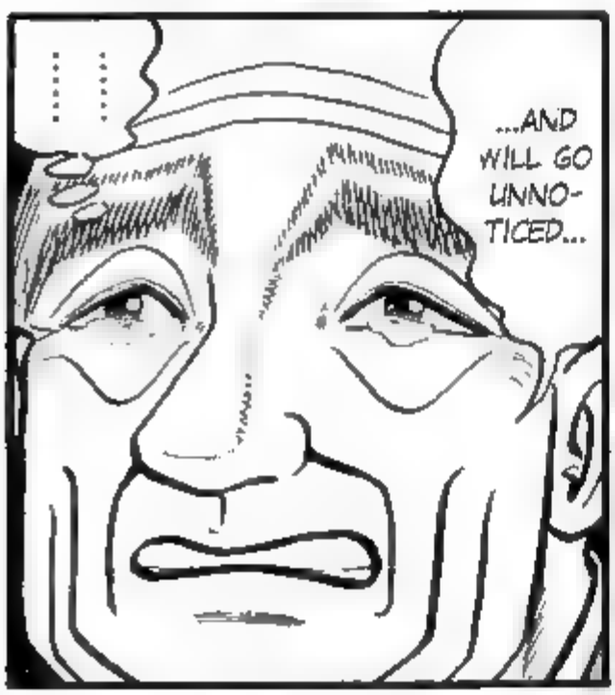


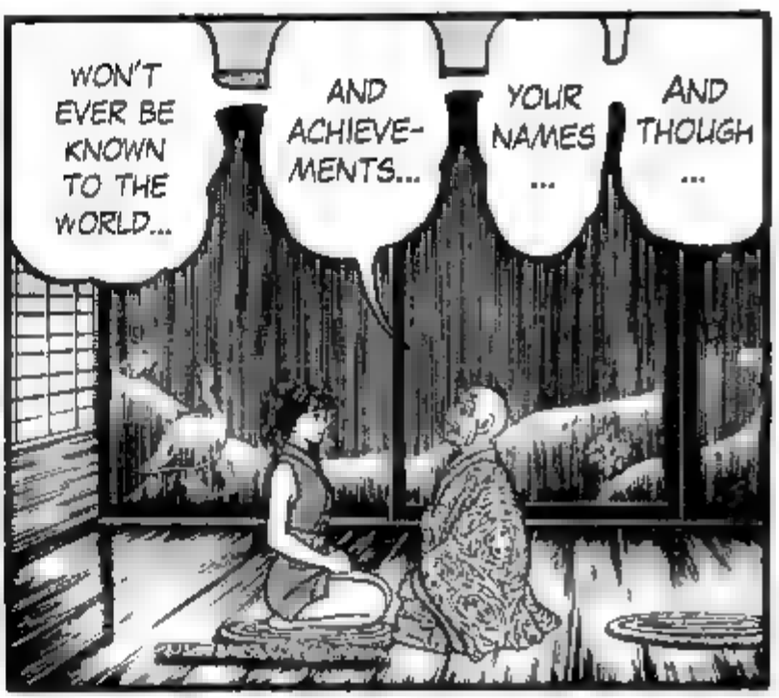
HYŪGA!!

AMAGI!!
NAGARA!!

UKIHA!!

AND THEN, AZUMI!!
RISKING YOUR INNOCENT LIVES,
YOU INDEED COMPLETED SUCH A VITAL MISSION!


...
...AND WILL GO UNNO-TICED...


AND THOUGH ...
YOUR NAMES ...
AND ACHIEVE-MENTS...
WON'T EVER BE KNOWN TO THE WORLD...

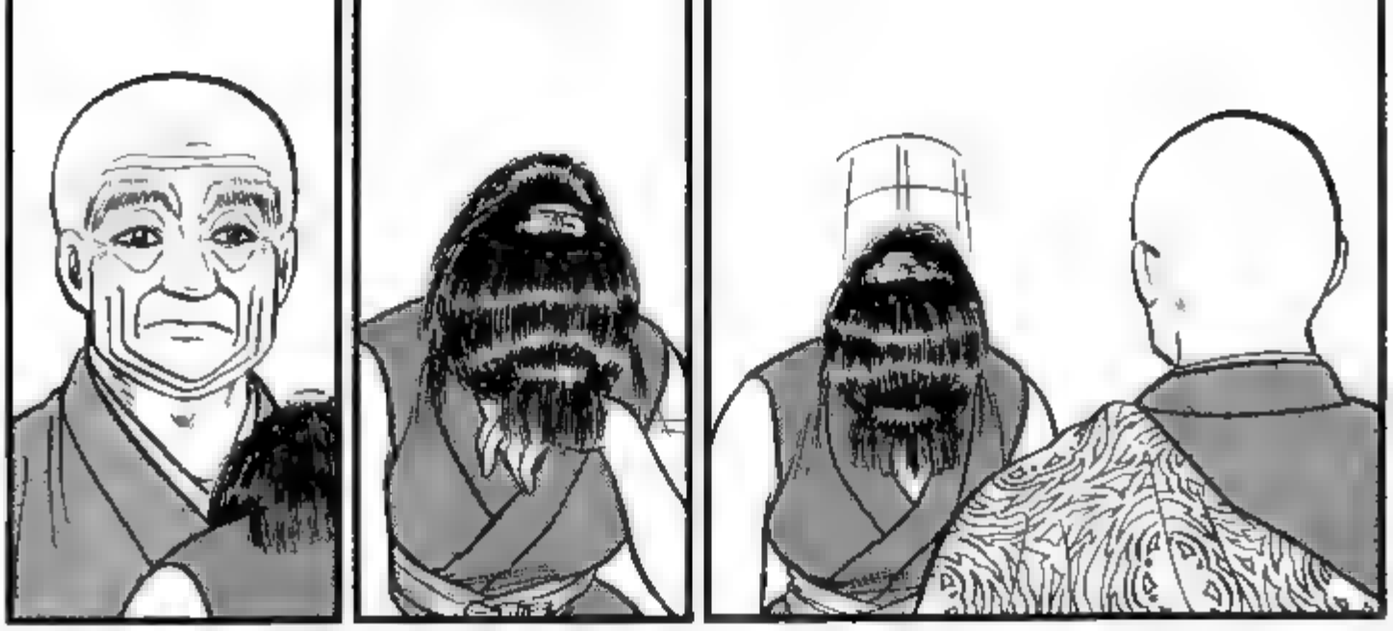
...

HOWEVER, HEAVEN WATCHES FROM ON HIGH!!

HYŪGA...

UKIHA...

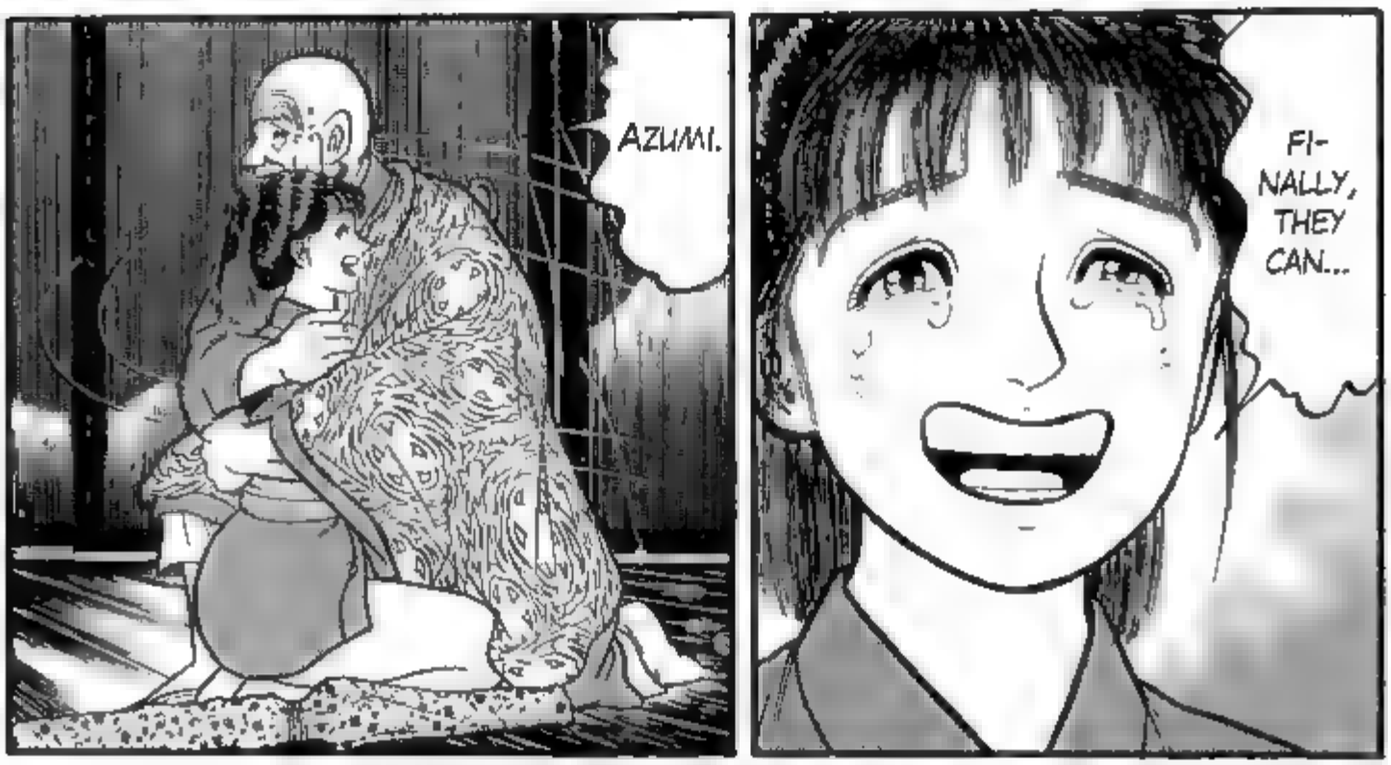
THANK YOU, MY "GRANDCHILDREN"!!... I WON'T EVER FORGET YOU!!
AMAGI...
.....
NAGARA...



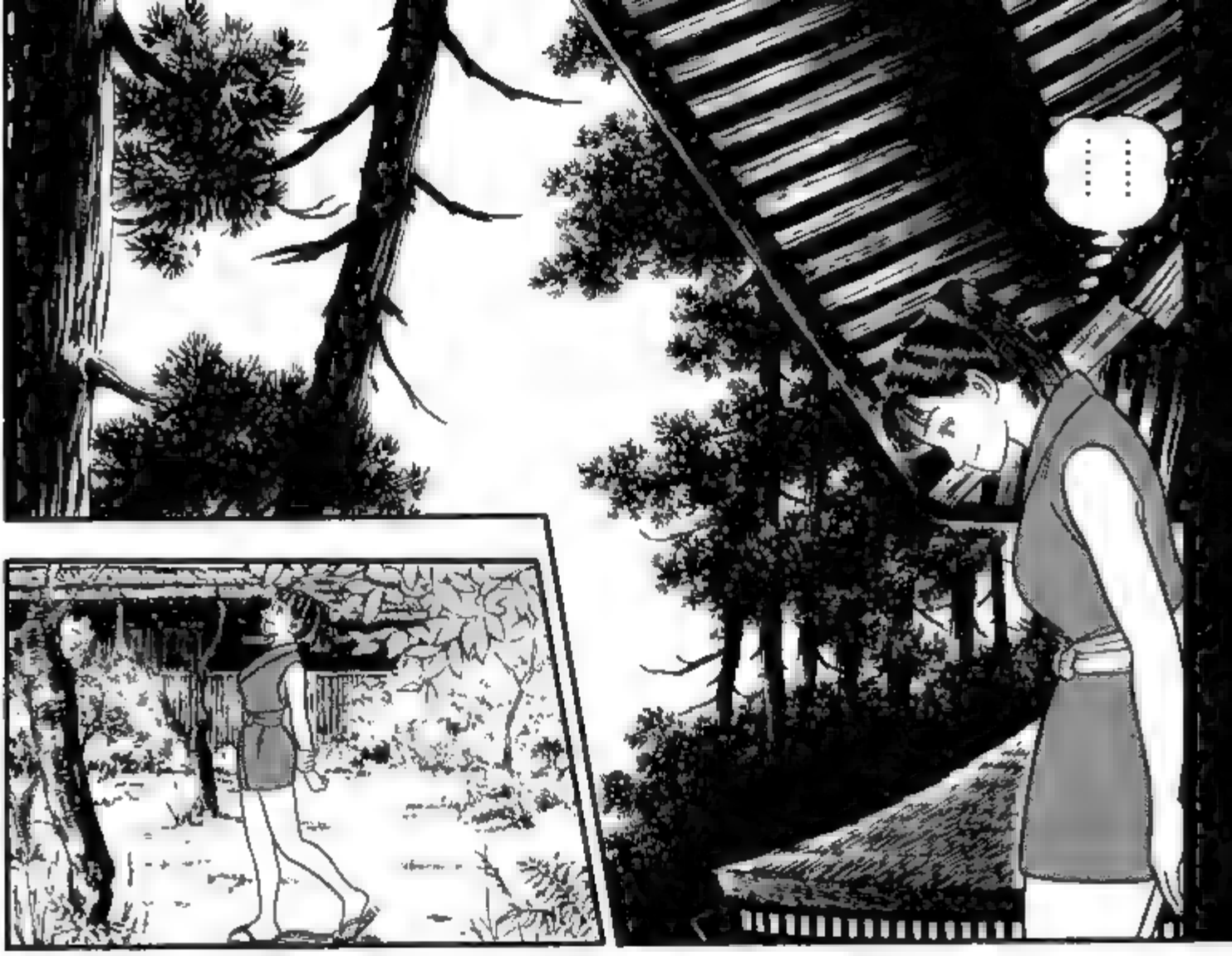
AH...

SOB...
UH...

THIS WAY... THIS WAY, THEY...
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
THANK YOU...


AZUMI.
FI-NALLY, THEY CAN...

YES!!
YES!!
REALLY GREAT!!
THEY... WERE REALLY...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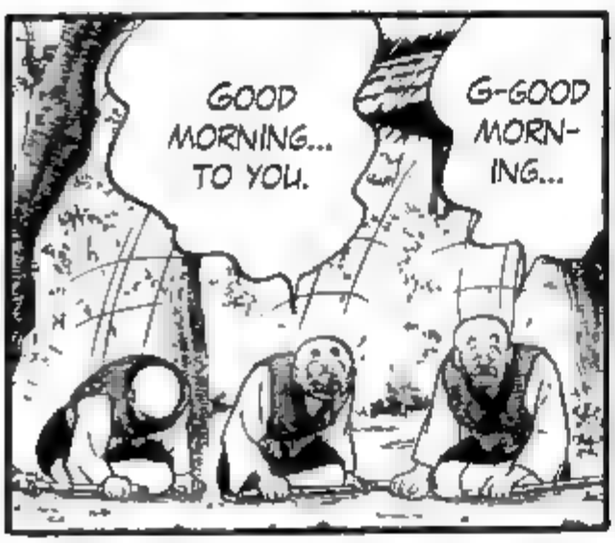
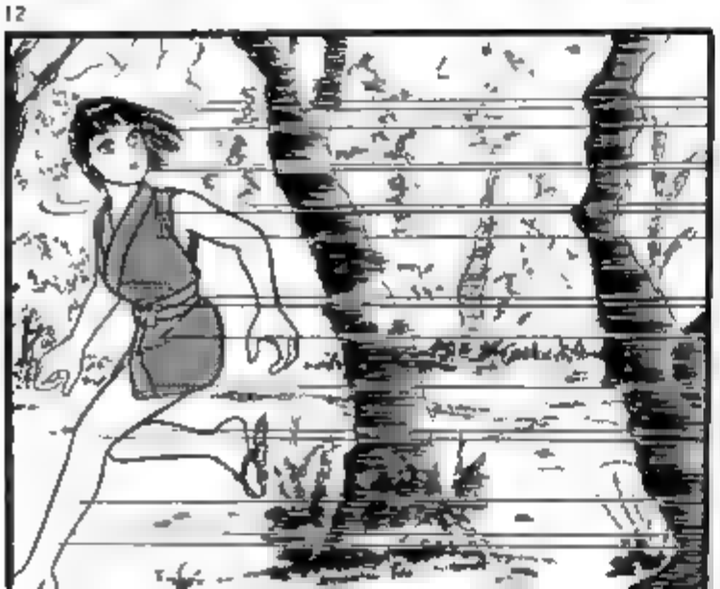

GOOD MORNING... TO YOU.
G-GOOD MORN-ING...

GOOD MORN-ING.



!!

EH!?

I'VE BEEN THINKING WHERE COULD YOU HAVE GONE AFTER THAT.
SO, YOU WERE THERE, EH, TOBIZARU-DONO?

AZUMI-DONO, C-COULD WE SPEAK OVER THERE?
YOU TOOK MY BELONGINGS FROM THAT SMALL TEMPLE FOR ME. THANK YOU.

OVER THERE...
EH!?

EH...
WHY!?
YOU PUT ME IN TROUBLE WHEN PEOPLE HEAR IT.
QUIT IT WITH THE FORMALITIES AND SIMPLY CALL ME TOBIZARU.

WHAT'S WRONG, TOBIZARU-DONO!?

WHY ARE YOU WITH TENKAI-SAMA NOW!?

THEN... TOBIZA-RU...
YES, THAT'S GOOD.

.....
COME ON!
DON'T YOU GET IT!?

SINCE I HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH YOU TOO.
I GUESS THAT I WAS PULLED IN
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT,
SEARCHING FOR PEOPLE WHO HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH YOU...
TENKAI-SAMA USED A LOT OF PEOPLE FOR A SEARCH PARTY...
WELL...

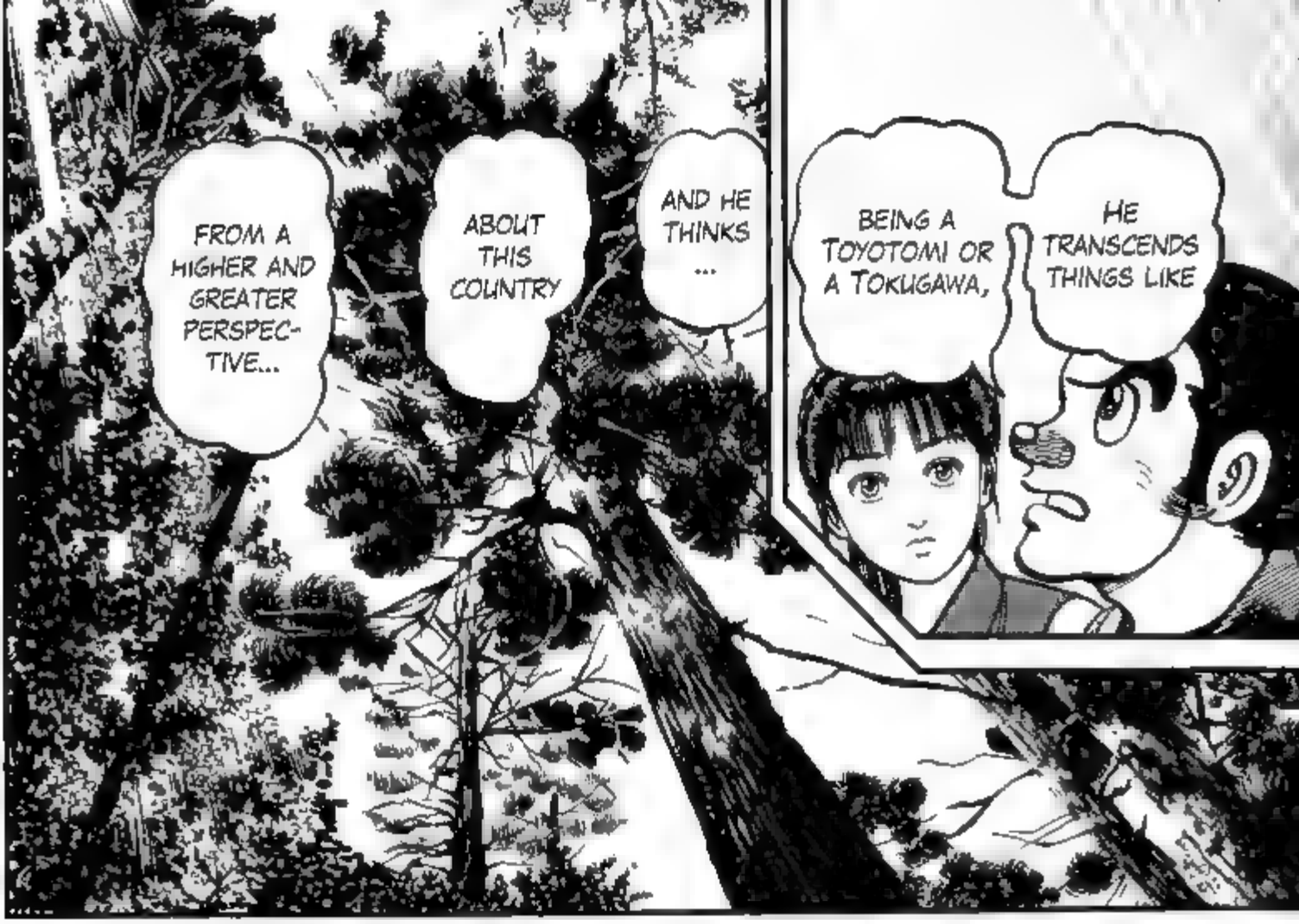
I MET WITH TENKAI-SAMA, BUT...
I WAS DRAWN IN SKILLFULLY...
PULLED IN...!?
.....

.....
EH!? IEYASU'S...
HIS RIGHT-HAND MAN, THE CLOSEST OF HIS CLOSE ASSOCIATES.
IT SEEMS HE WAS IEYASU'S, KANBEE-SAMA'S MORTAL FOE...

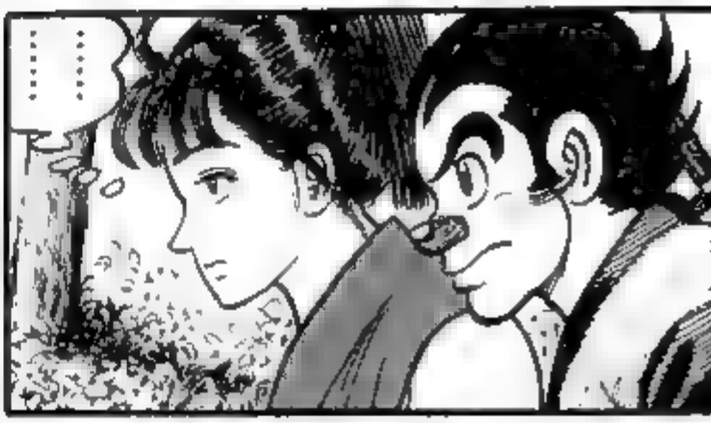
IS WONDERFUL!!
THAT PERSON ...

.....

THAT'S WHY AT FIRST I THOUGHT HE WAS AN ENEMY.
BUT YOU KNOW...


HE TRANSCENDS THINGS LIKE
BEING A TOYOTOMI OR A TOKUGAWA,
AND HE THINKS ...
ABOUT THIS COUNTRY
FROM A HIGHER AND GREATER PERSPEC-TIVE...

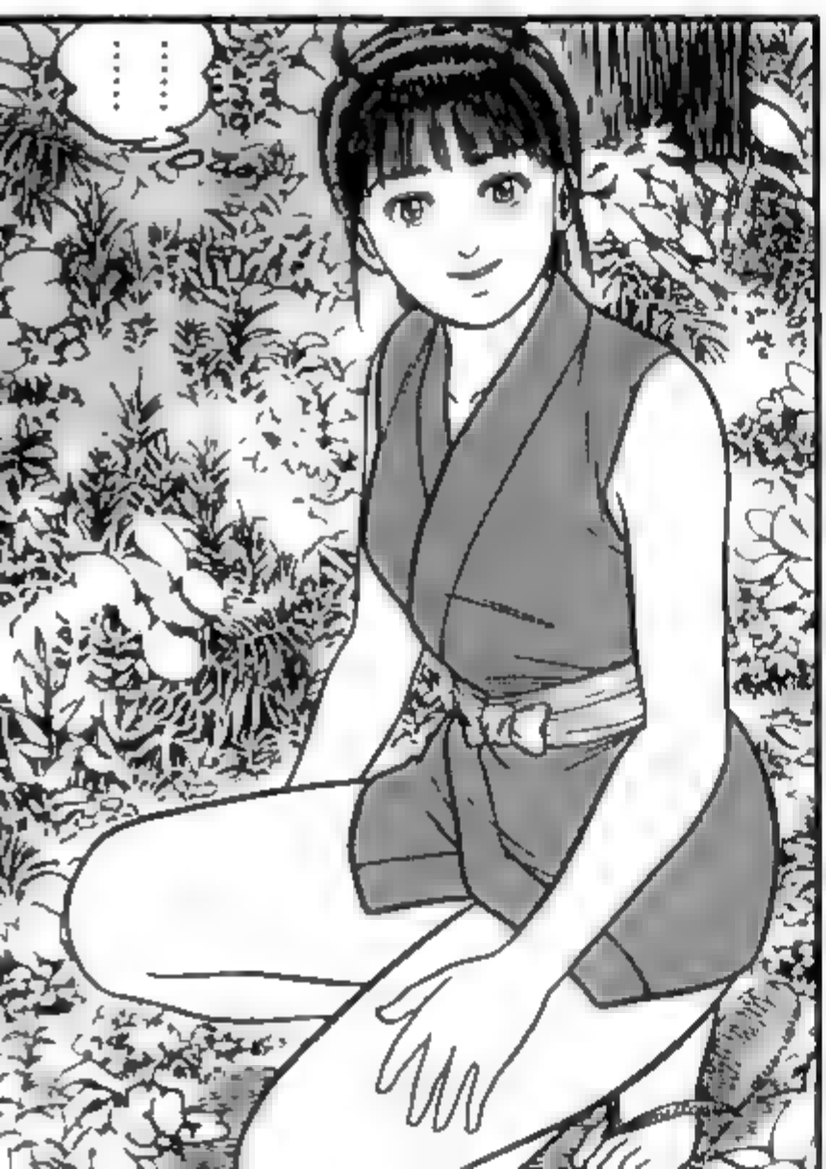
I FELT...
LIKE MY EYES WERE OPENED.


.....

I ALSO... FELT AS IF I'D LOST MY SOUL FOR SOME TIME...

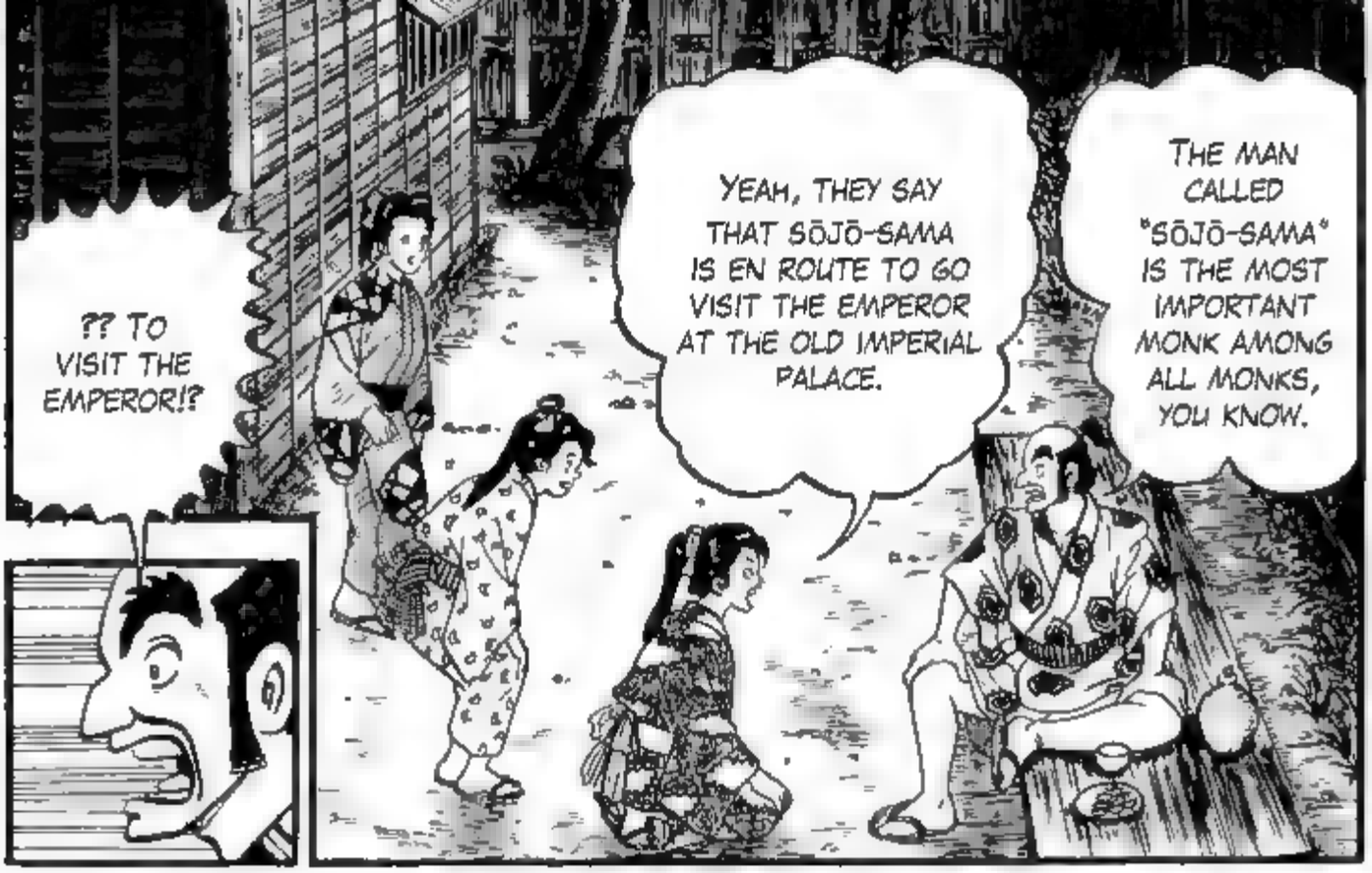
AFTER I LOST KANBEE-SAMA WHO WAS MORE THAN A PARENT FOR ME...
.....

I STILL HAD... SOME-THING HOT IN HERE...

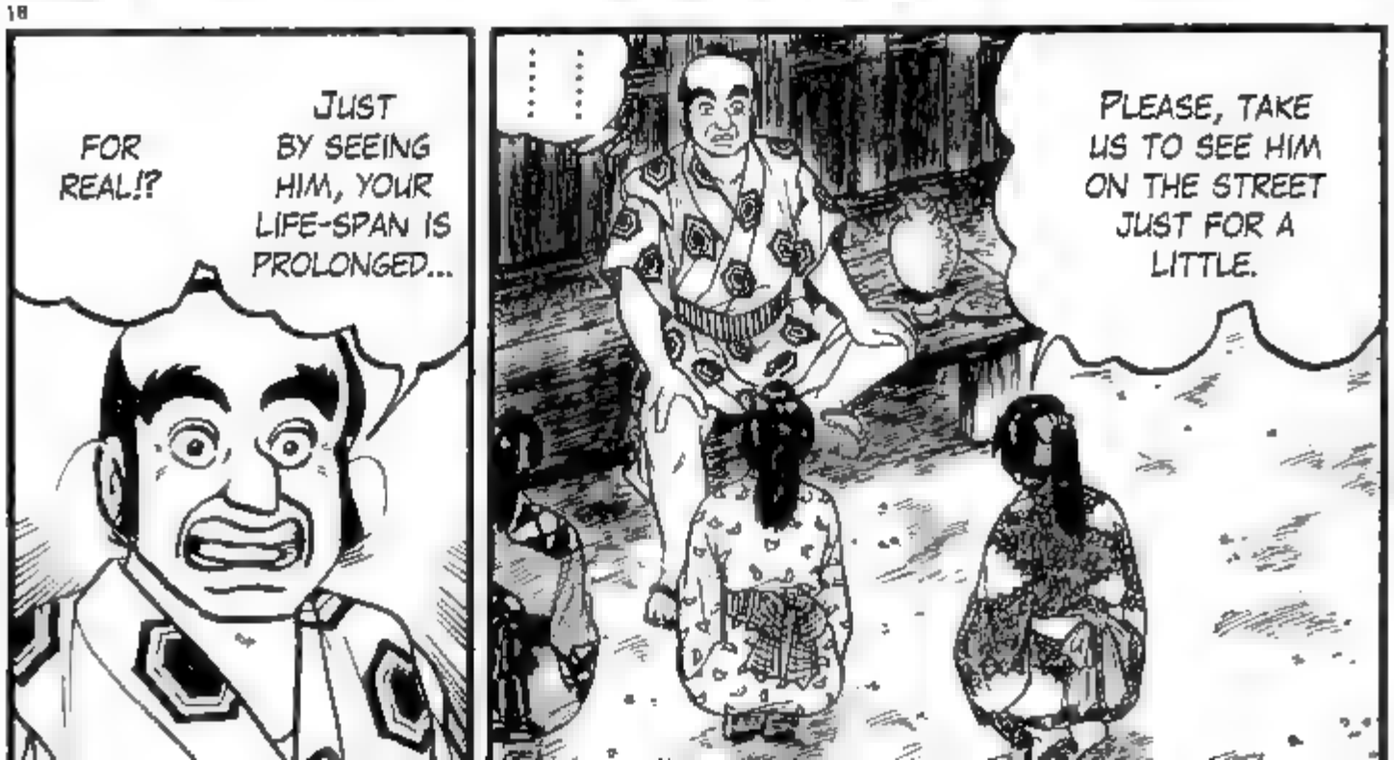

.....

ONCE AGAIN TO PUT MY LIFE ON THE LINE
SO I FELT INCLINED TO TRY

AND WORK!!


?? TO VISIT THE EMPEROR!?
YEAH, THEY SAY THAT SŌJŌ-SAMA IS EN ROUTE TO GO VISIT THE EMPEROR AT THE OLD IMPERIAL PALACE.
THE MAN CALLED "SŌJŌ-SAMA" IS THE MOST IMPORTANT MONK AMONG ALL MONKS, YOU KNOW.

EVERYONE SAYS IT.
IT IS.
IS IT TRUE!?
JUST BY SEEING THAT MONK!!
YOUR LIFE IS EVEN EXTEND-ED
THEY SAY THAT STAYING NEAR THAT MONK OR JUST SEEING HIM YOU RECEIVE DIVINE GRACE!


FOR REAL!?
JUST BY SEEING HIM, YOUR LIFE-SPAN IS PROLONGED...
.....
PLEASE, TAKE US TO SEE HIM ON THE STREET JUST FOR A LITTLE.

THE PALANQUIN YOU REQUESTED HAS BEEN PREPARED.
UHM...
SO...I GUESS THAT THE RUMOR SPREAD, RIGHT!?
YES. PROBABLY THE ROAD UP TO THE OLD IMPERIAL PALACE WILL BE FULL OF PEOPLE.

I SEE...
THEN,
SEE THAT AZUMI IS READY FOR GOING OUT.
YES.

WHAT KIND OF CLOTHES SHOULD SHE WEAR!?
SHE'LL BE FINE WITH WHAT SHE ALWAYS WEARS.
AFTER ALL, WE NEED THE ASSASSINS TO KNOW IT'S AZUMI FROM A DISTANCE...

SIR!! THANK YOU!!
THIS IS A FINE PALAN-QUIN.
YES!!

NO, NO WAY! I'LL ACCOMPANY YOU BY FOOT.
EH!?

COME TOO, AZUMI, LET'S RIDE IN THIS TOGETHER.

RIDE WITH ME.
IN THAT CASE, HAVING YOU NEAR, I'D LIKE YOU TO PROTECT ME.

BUT THERE COULD BE SOME ROGUES WHO COULD EVEN ATTEMPT TO KILL ME...
IF YOU'RE WITH ME, EVEN THE ASSASSINS AFTER YOU WILL BE UNABLE TO MEDDLE WITH YOU...

IT'S THAT FOR SURE!!
AH!! THAT!!
.....

AT ALL THESE PEOPLE.
LOOK, AZUMI,

AND GRIEF AS WELL...
THEIR SOR-ROWS

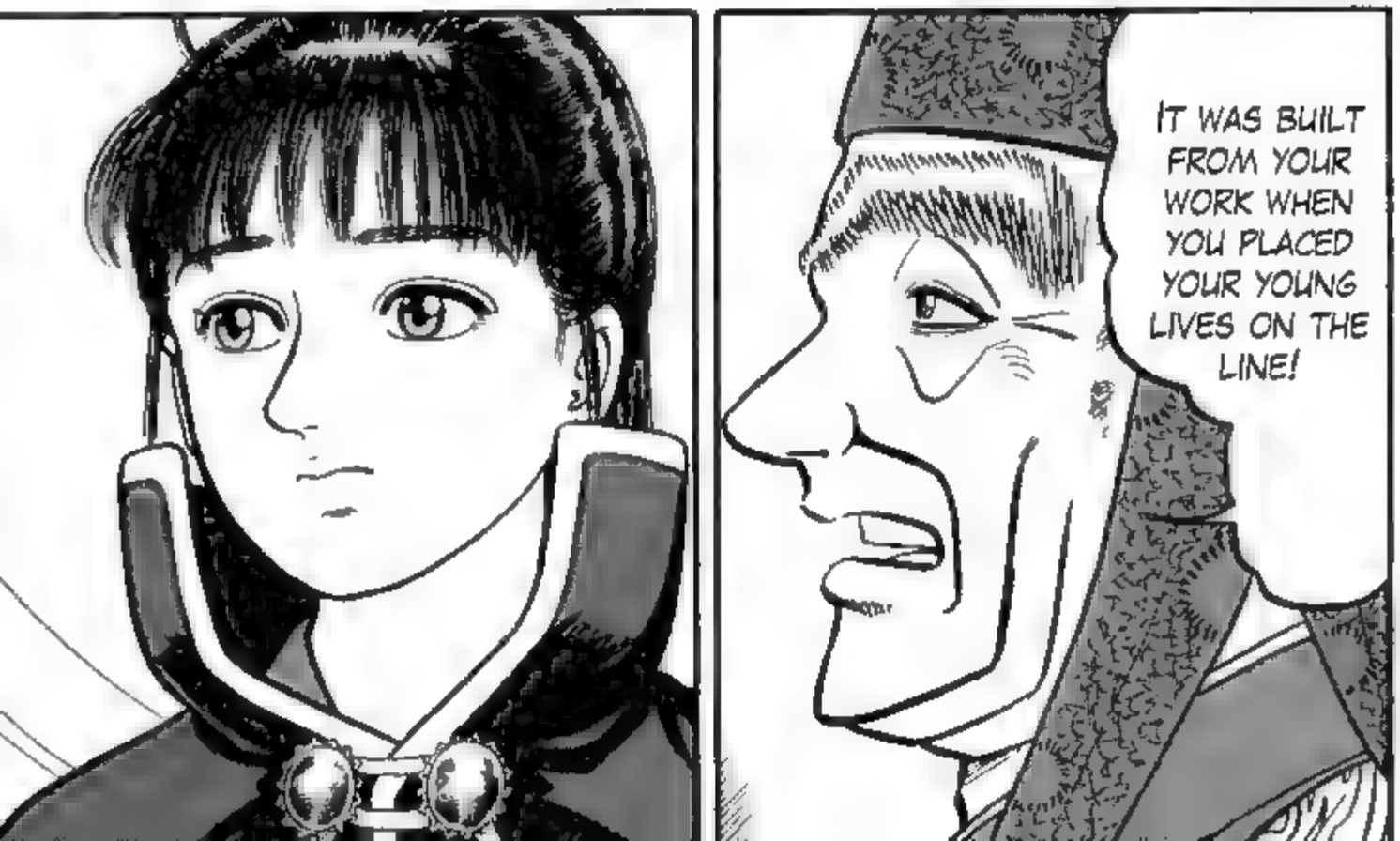
WHILE THEY LIVE, THEY EACH HAVE...
THESE PEOPLE...

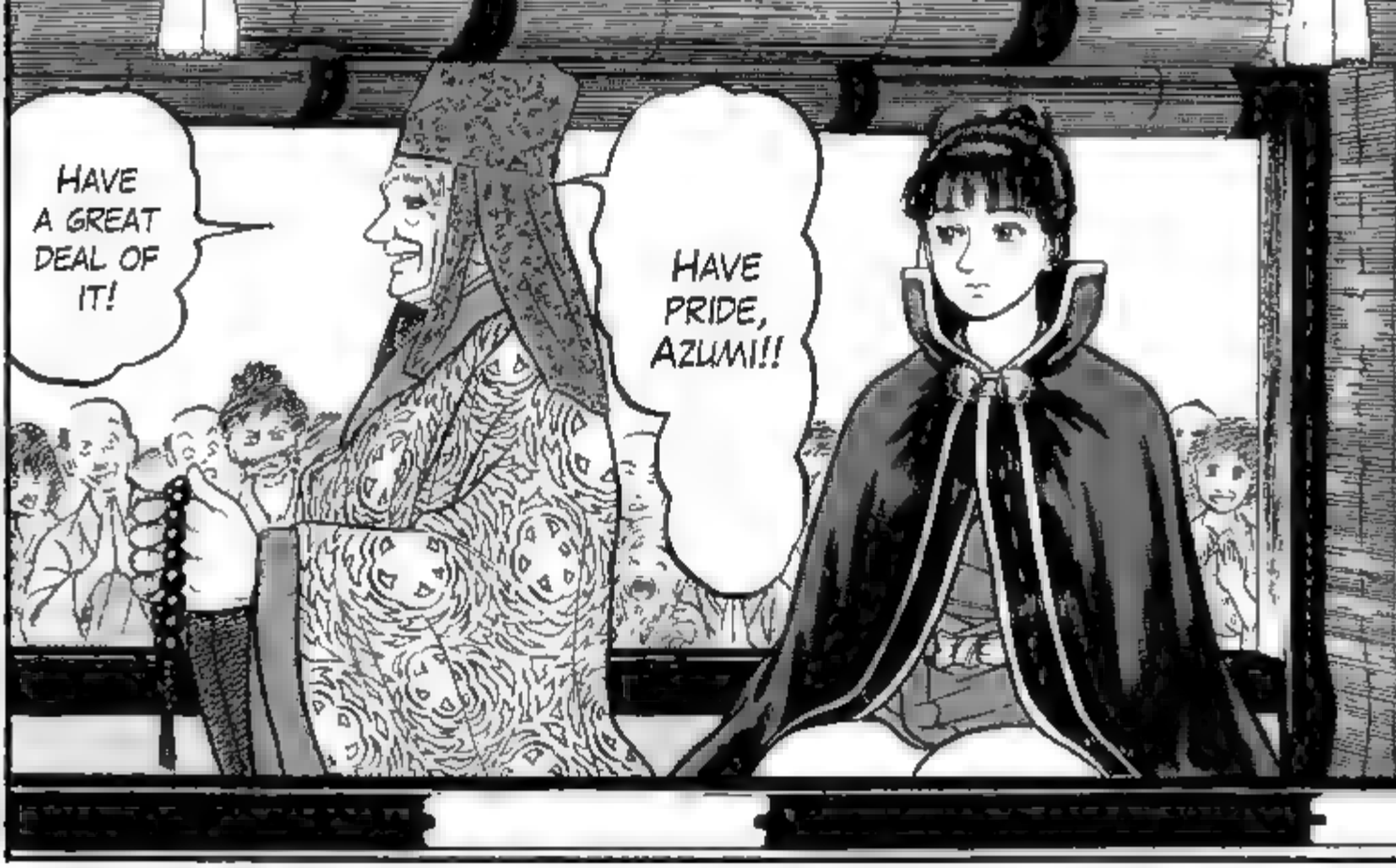
ILL-
NESSES
LACK-
INGS,
PART-
INGS,
DIS-
PUTES,
.....

A WORLD WITH NO WARS IS INDEED
THE BEST THERE CAN EVER BE!
THERE'S NO ATROCITY THAT SUR-PASSES A WAR!!
HOW-EVER,

THESE PEOPLE A PEACEFUL WORLD LIKE NO OTHER?
WHO WAS ABLE TO GIVE
NOW,

NAGA-RA!!
AMA-GI!!
UKI-HA!!
HYŪ-GA!!
AZU-MI!!


IT WAS BUILT FROM YOUR WORK WHEN YOU PLACED YOUR YOUNG LIVES ON THE LINE!


HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF IT!
HAVE PRIDE, AZUMI!!

WHO DIED DURING YOUR MISSIONS!!
TO GO ON LIVING WITH PRIDE EVEN FOR YOUR COMRADES
YOU HAVE

I WAS LOSING MY PRIDE...AND MY CONFIDENCE...
LATELY ...
AND MY REASON TO LIVE...

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!!

YES!!
YES!!

SHOULD WE AIM AT AZUMI'S LIFE AGAIN!?
WHAT DO WE DO!?
TO THINK THAT... THE ONE WHO SHELTERED AZUMI WAS TENKAI-SAMA...

BUT... BUT...
WHAT WE ACCEPTED WAS A SHŌGUN'S ORDER...!!
EVEN IF SHE'S PROTECTED BY TENKAI-SAMA,

I HEARD THAT THE NEXT SHŌGUN IN LINE, IEMITSU-SAMA, ALREADY TOTALLY ADORES HIM...
THERE'RE RUMORS SAYING THAT HIDETADA-SAMA IS KEEPING HIM SLIGHTLY AT DISTANCE TOO, BUT
WHATEVER WE MAY SAY, TENKAI-SAMA WAS THE TŌSHŌ DAIGONGEN'S...

.....
.....
IT'S BETTER THAT THIS IS DONE ONLY BY THOSE WHO WANT TO DO IT NO MATTER WHAT.
ME TOO!!

I GIVE UP!!

IT'S THAT, EH?
OH!! HERE IT COMES!!

COME CLOSER TO THE FRONT!
SAYO, ARE YOU HERE!?

AAAH, BESTOW UPON ME A GREAT DEAL OF DIVINE GRACE!
AND ASK TO DRIVE AWAY THE GODS OF FATIGUE AND ILLNESSES!
PRAY THE VENERABLE MONK FROM AFAR
ALWAYS WITH A GLOOMY FACE, JEEZ...
ガヤガヤ

ガヤガヤ

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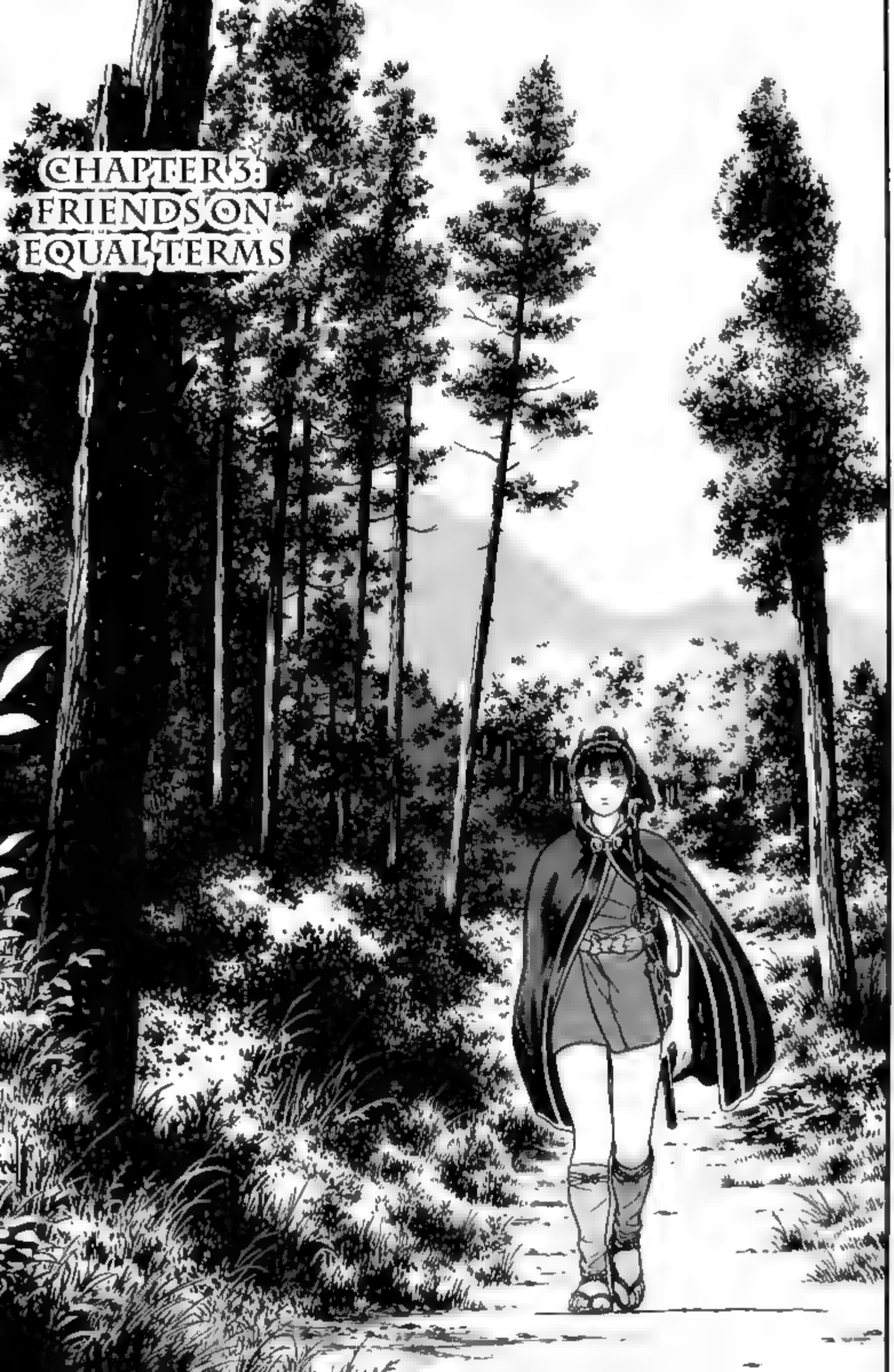
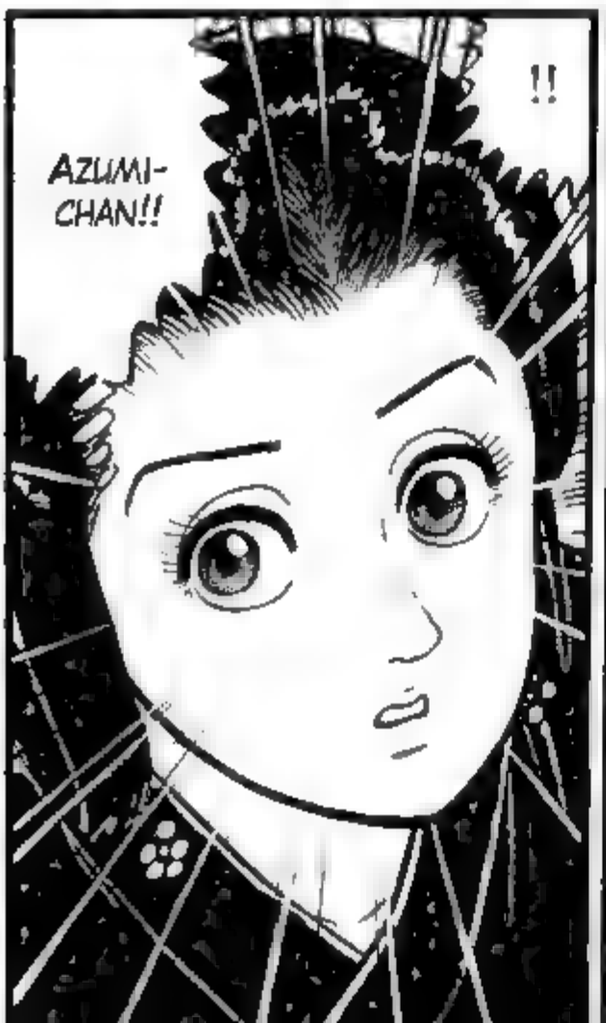
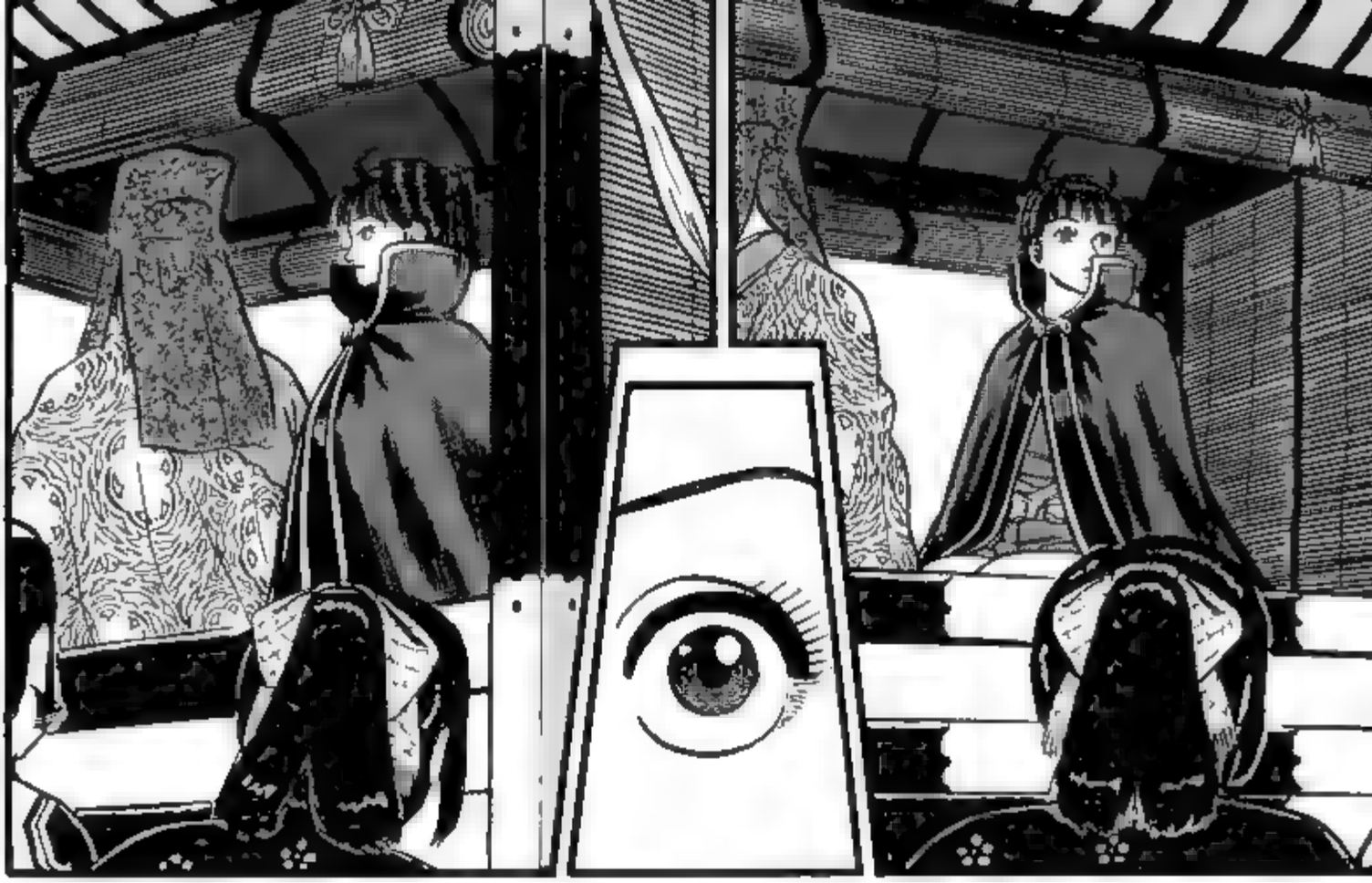

CHAPTER 3:
FRIENDS ON
EQUAL TERMS

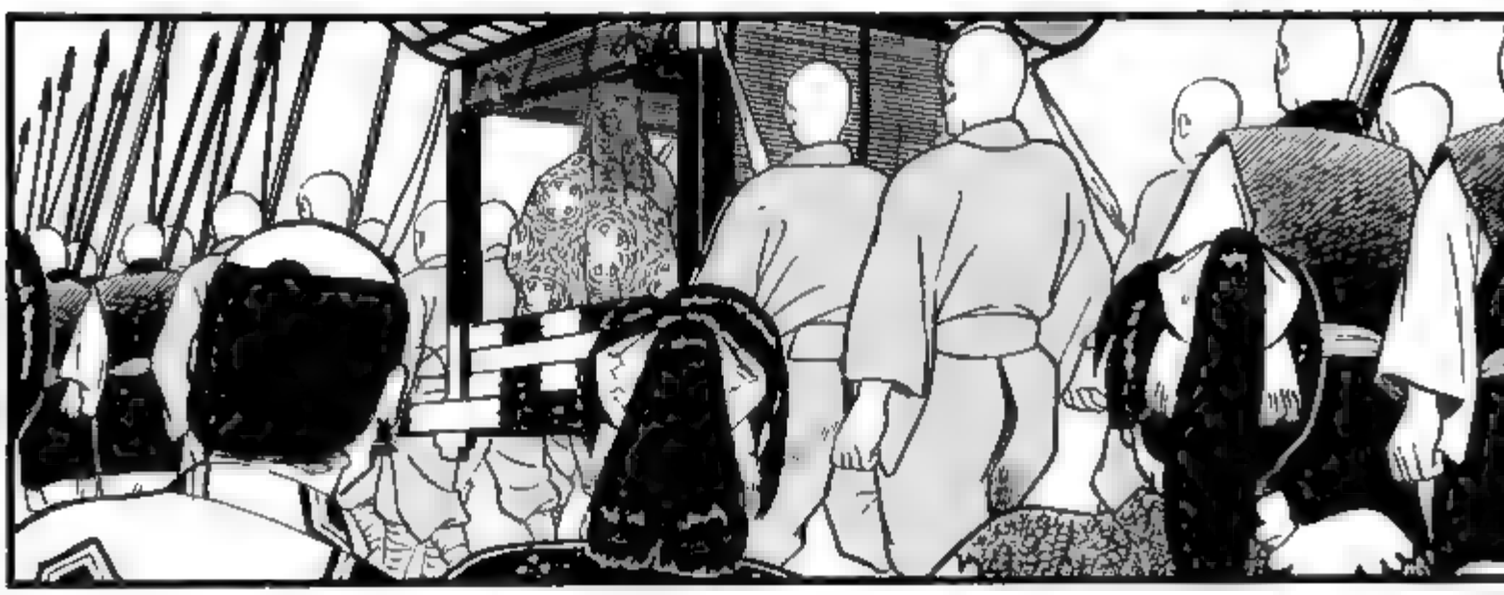
AZUMI
...
SO THAT MONK'S THE GREAT SŌJŌ-SAMA, IS HE!?

PLEASE! GIVE ME A WHOLE LOTTA DIVINE GRACE!
EH? HEY!!
IS IT TRUE THAT JUST SEEING HIM MAKES YA LIVE LONGER?

ブツブツ
ブツブツ

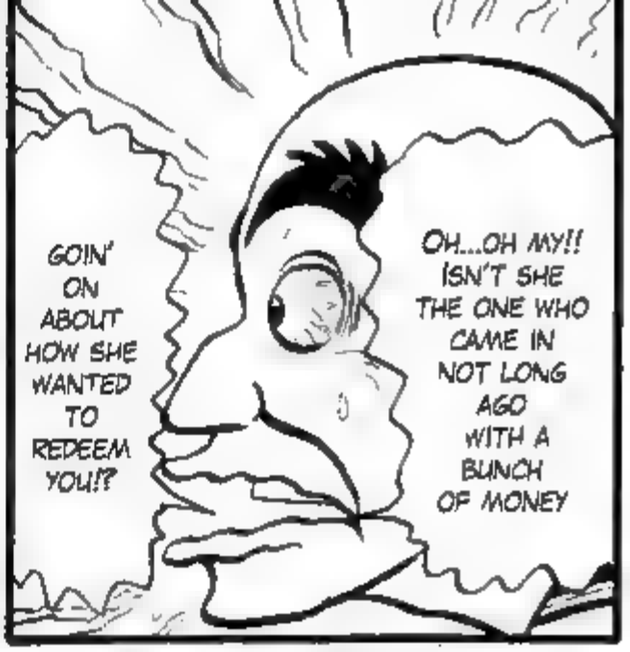

!!
AZUMI-CHAN!!





WITH THE MANTLE!
THE GIRL IN THE BACK...
SAYO ...
WHAT!?
S-SAYO!
UM...

MYY!!!!! GOODNESS !!!!!
SHE A FRIEND A'YOURS!?


OH...OH MY!! ISN'T SHE THE ONE WHO CAME IN NOT LONG AGO WITH A BUNCH OF MONEY
GOIN' ON ABOUT HOW SHE WANTED TO REDEEM YOU!?

EEEEEE EEEEH!?

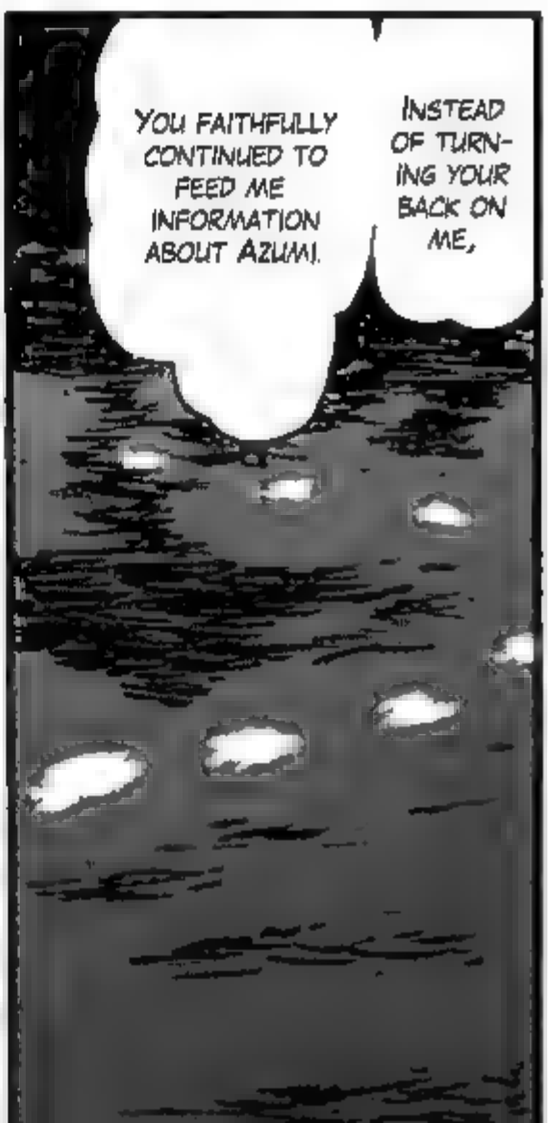
FORGET YOUR DUTIES TONIGHT AND KEEP ME COMPANY!
IT'S FINE! DRINK!
NO, I...

I ACCEPT IT!
O-OKAY...

I HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH MY MISSION.
THOUGH I'VE BEEN CLOSE TO AZUMI SO MANY TIMES...

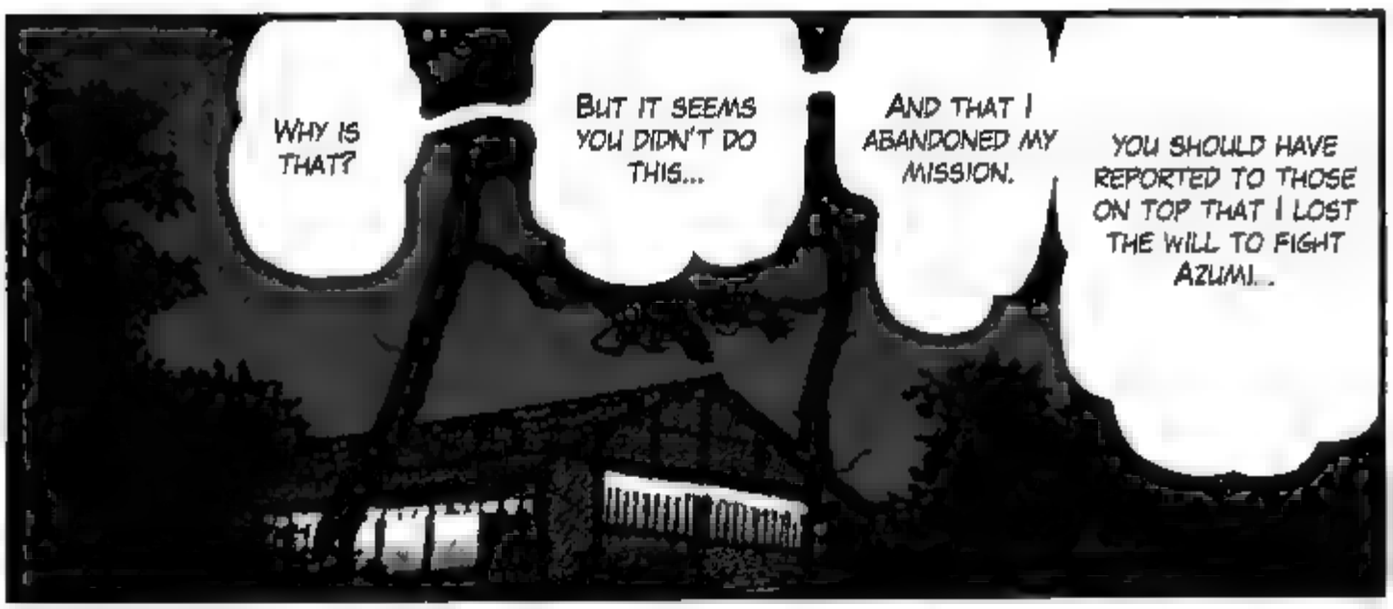
THEN, MY HUMBLEST APPRECIATION.

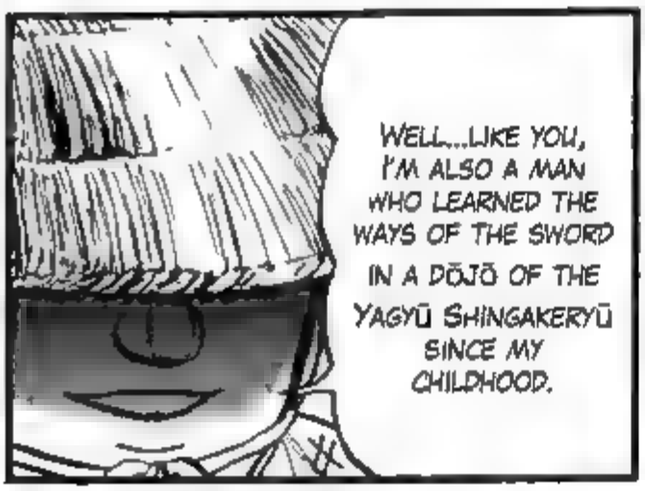
"WHAT'S SAKON DOING!? DOES HE FEAR AZUMI!?... OR WHAT ELSE!?"...


INSTEAD OF TURNING YOUR BACK ON ME,
YOU FAITHFULLY CONTINUED TO FEED ME INFORMATION ABOUT AZUMI.

YOU MUST HAVE HAD THOUGHTS LIKE THIS.
BUT YOU HELD YOUR TONGUE AND REMAINED LOYAL TO THIS DAY.

SPEAK-ING OF DUTY..
NOT AT ALL! SEARCHING IS ONLY MY DUTY!
I'M GRATE-FUL...


WHY IS THAT?
BUT IT SEEMS YOU DIDN'T DO THIS...
AND THAT I ABANDONED MY MISSION.
YOU SHOULD HAVE REPORTED TO THOSE ON TOP THAT I LOST THE WILL TO FIGHT AZUMI...


WELL...LIKE YOU, I'M ALSO A MAN WHO LEARNED THE WAYS OF THE SWORD IN A DŌJŌ OF THE YAGYŪ SHINGAKERYŪ SINCE MY CHILDHOOD.

.....

OOH ...

AND THOUGHT TO FIND MY SUCCESS USING THOSE ARTS..

IT WAS WHEN SAKON-SAMA WAS SEVENTEEN, THE DAY YOU ENTERED THE EDO DŌJŌ FOR THE FIRST TIME...
I THINK...
THE FAME OF THE NAME OF A BRILLIANT YOUNG SWORDSMAN NAMED KURAISHI SAKON IN THE FAR-OFF YAGYŪ VILLAGE REACHED EVEN EDO!

WERE EASILY BEATEN ALTOGETHER BY SAKON-SAMA.. WITHOUT EVEN HITTING YOU ONCE...
THOSE ASSISTANT INSTRUCTORS BRIMMING WITH CONFIDENCE...
"WHO THE HECK DOES KURAISHI SAKON THINK HE IS!!"...SO, THE EDO PROMINENT ASSISTANT INSTRUCTORS LAID IN WAIT, BUT...
I SAW THAT MOMENT...

.....
I REMEMBER THAT I WAS SHIVERING.
I WAS TRULY... STUNNED.

I GET IT. YOU CAN STOP NOW.
BUT NOW...THAT I'VE BEEN APPOINTED TO WORK FOR YOU, SAKON-SAMA...IT'S...
I GAVE UP ON SUCCESS IN LIFE BY USING THE SWORD...
FORGIVE MY RUDE-NESS.
YES...
.....
ENOUGH TALKING ABOUT THE PAST!
....HUH!?
.....

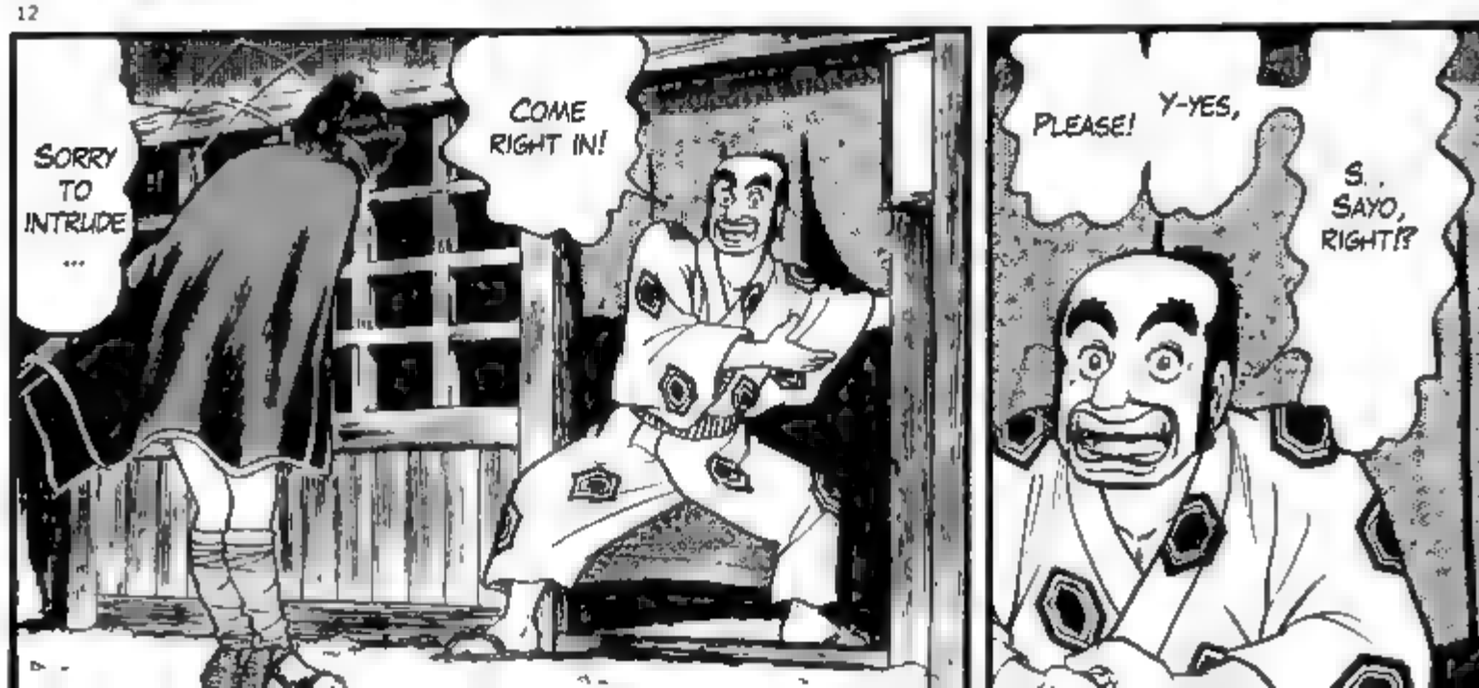
AZUMI-CHAN WAS RAISED BY SUCH AN AMAZING PERSON...
EVEN AT THAT TIME, HER GRAMPA MET WITH THE RULER, IEYASU-SAMA...
THAT'S RIGHT... NOW THAT I THINK OF IT...
AZUMI-CHAN...
IS NOW IN A POSITION TO BE PROTECTED BY THE GREAT MONK...

AZUMI-CHAN AND I HAVE BEEN AS NIGHT AND DAY FROM THE VERY BEGINNING.
SO ABSURD...
HOW COULD... WE BE FRIENDS ON EQUAL TERMS?
AND SHE WAS SERVING THIS NATION BACK THEN. FROM THE VERY START, OUR POSITIONS WERE SO VERY DIFFERENT...

IT SHOULD BE TIME TO...
SAKON-SAMA... I THINK THAT'S ENOUGH SAKE FOR TODAY.
.....
ガ"タ.!

AND GO SO FAR AWAY...?
LEAVE ME BE-HIND?
ARE YOU GONNA
AZUMI!!!!
..
AZUMI-!!!!!!!!
IF SHE'S PROTECTED BY TENKAI'S AUTHORITY...SHE COULD PROBABLY ESCAPE HER PURSUERS AND SURVIVE...

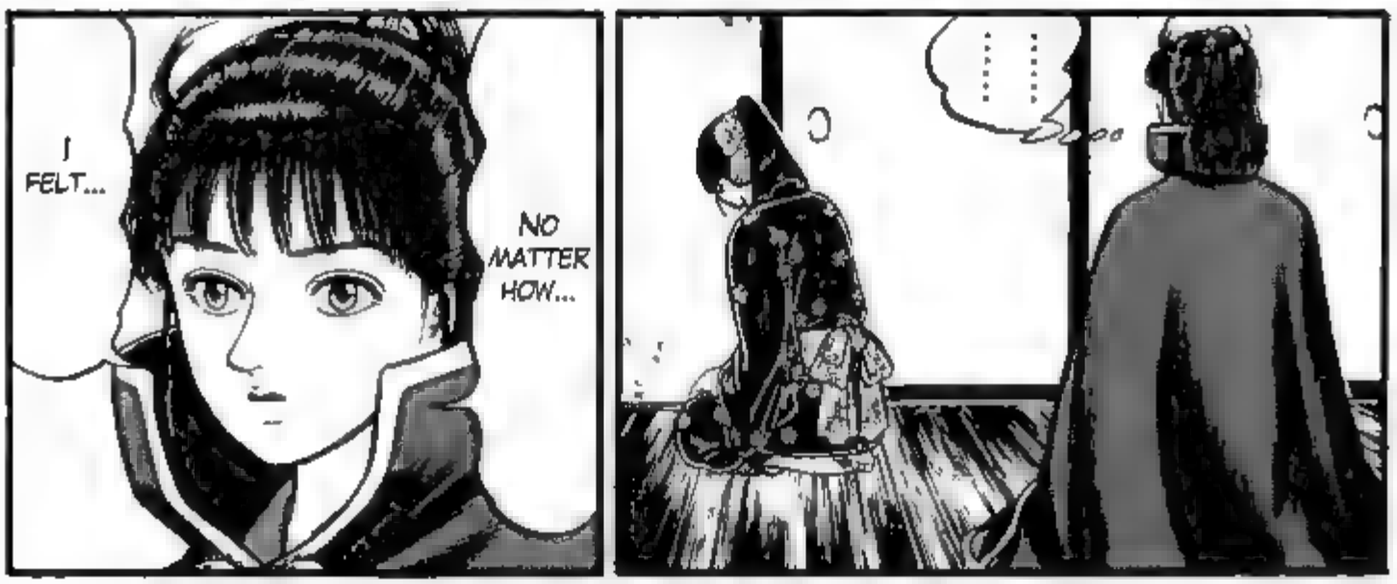
AH...


SORRY TO INTRUDE ...
COME RIGHT IN!
PLEASE!
Y-YES,
S. SAYO, RIGHT!?

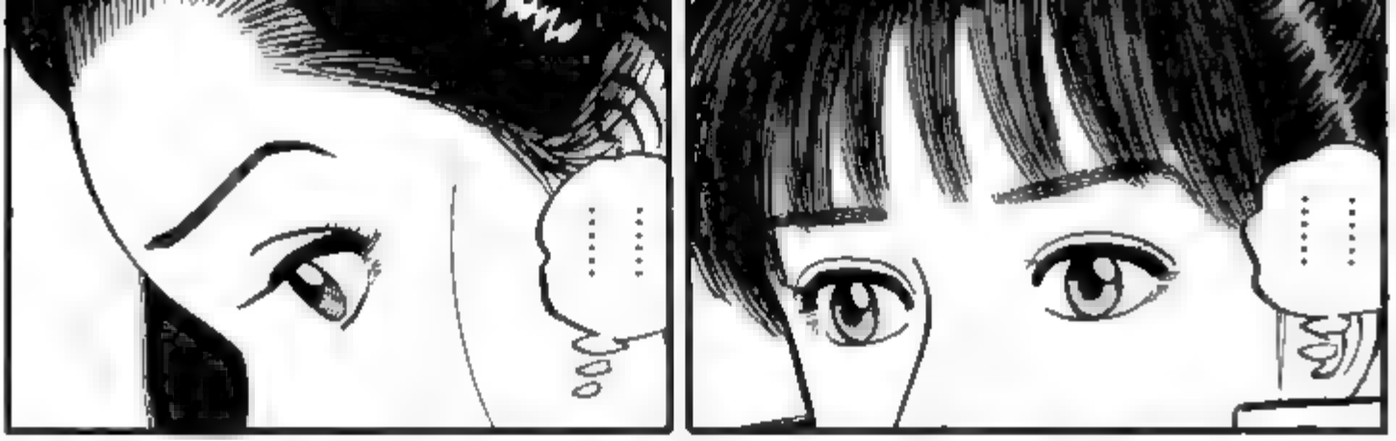
WHAT ARE YOU DOING!? QUICK! COME!
SHE'S WAITING!

ドン!
HURRY IT UP!

PLEASE, TAKE YOUR TIME!
NOW, THEN!
ピシャッ!


I FELT...
NO MATTER HOW...

I'M TRULY SORRY!
DEEPLY WOUNDING YOUR HEART, YAE-CHAN!
THE RESULT WAS I ENDED UP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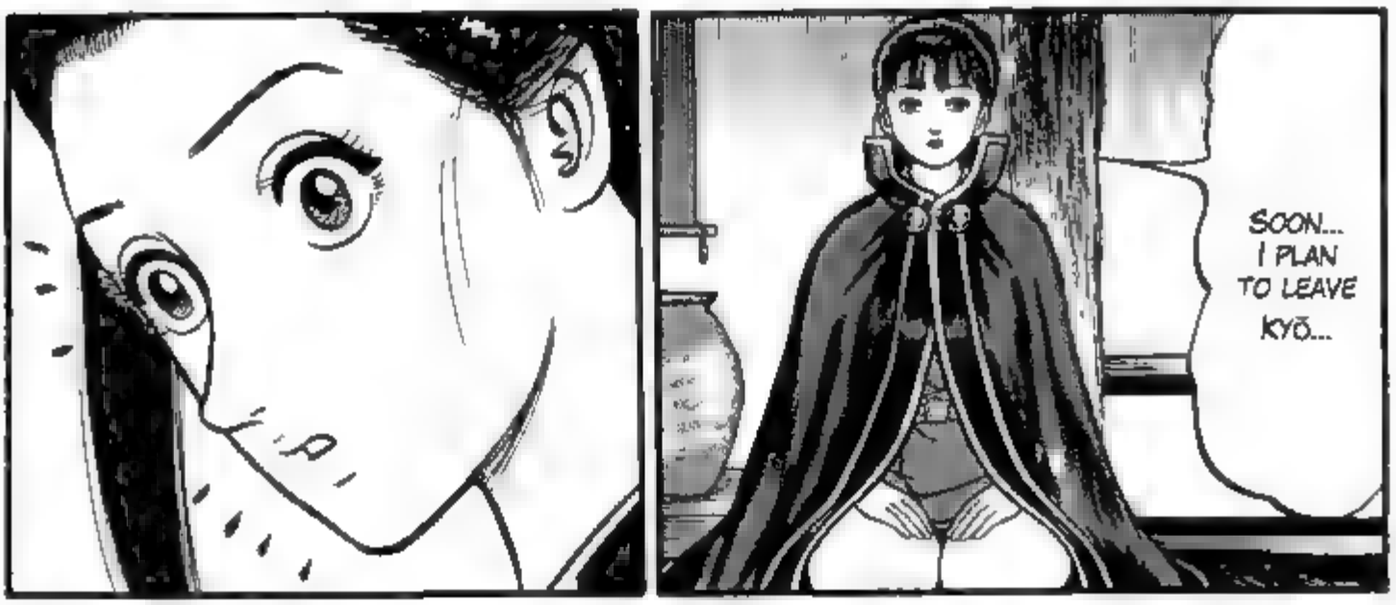
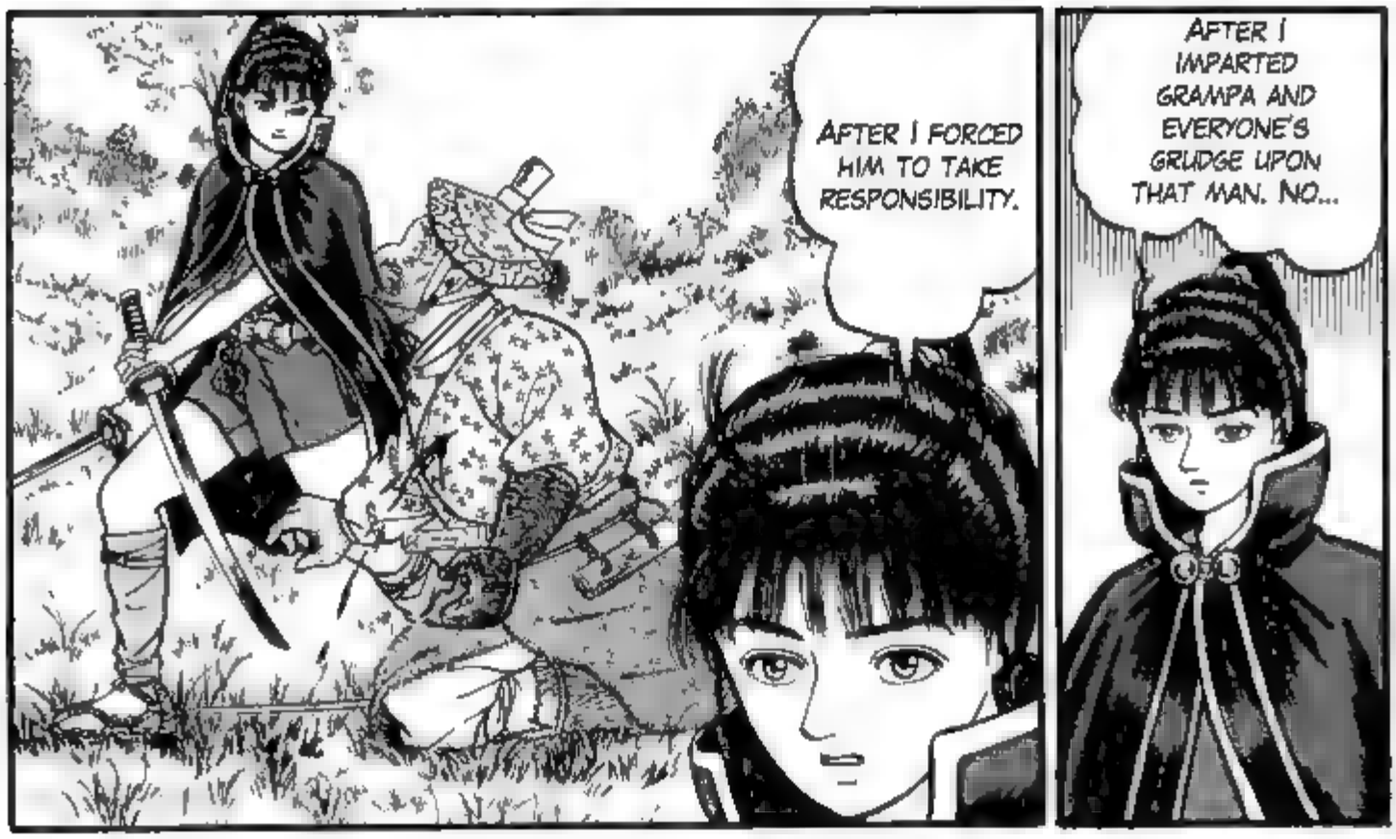

SOON... I PLAN TO LEAVE KYŌ...

.....
.....
.....
AND SO...I WON'T BE ABLE..
TO SEE YOU ANYMORE..

.....
.....

BECOME ALL ALONE...
I'VE...


AFTER I FORCED HIM TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY.
AFTER I IMPARTED GRAMPA AND EVERYONE'S GRUDGE UPON THAT MAN. NO...

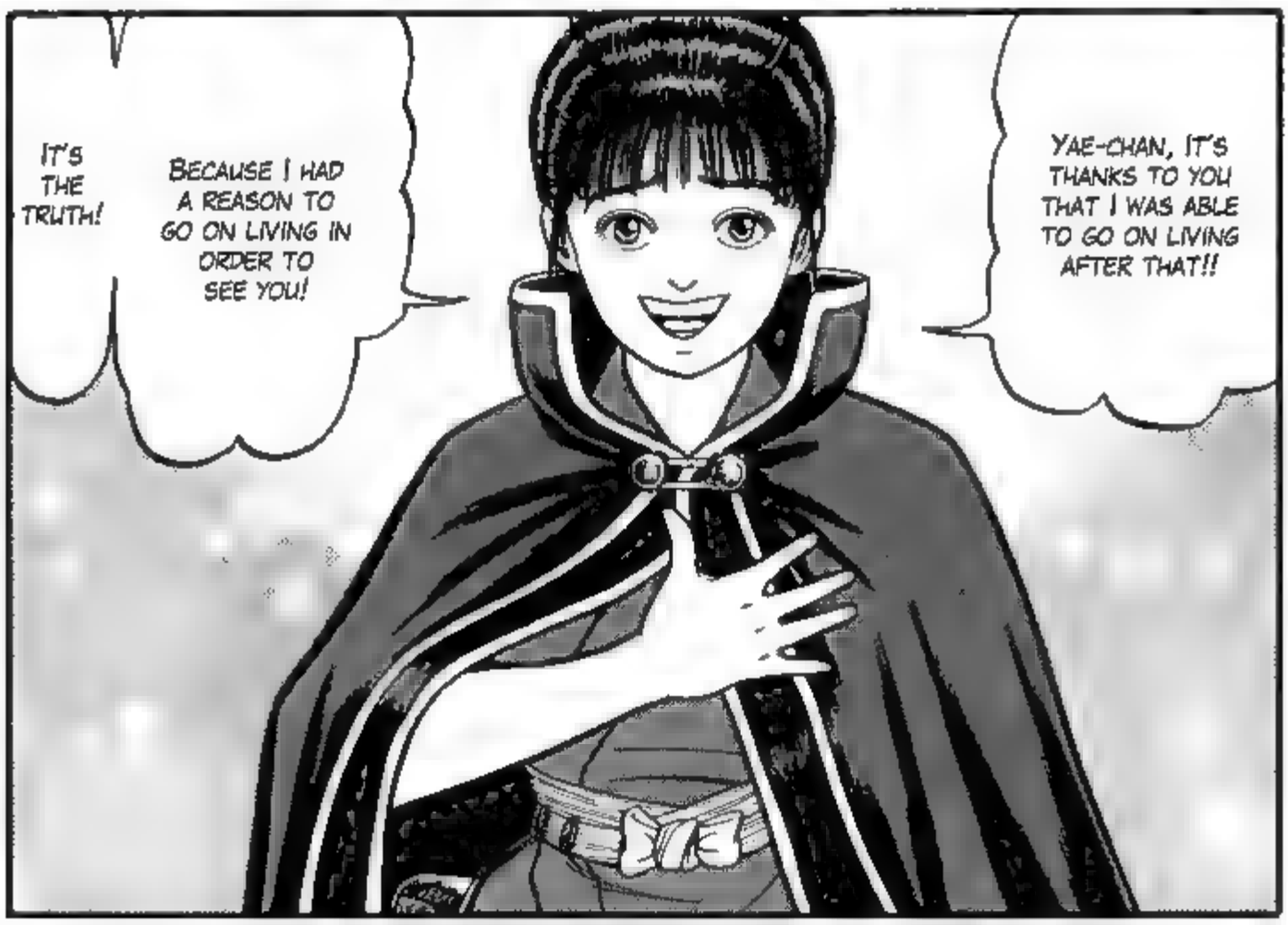
I'D HAVE HAD NO REASON TO LIVE! NO PURPOSE, NOTHING!
HADN'T HAD YOU, YAE-CHAN,
IF I
WAS MY DESIRE TO SEE YOU!
WITHIN ME. THE ONLY THOUGHT LEFT...

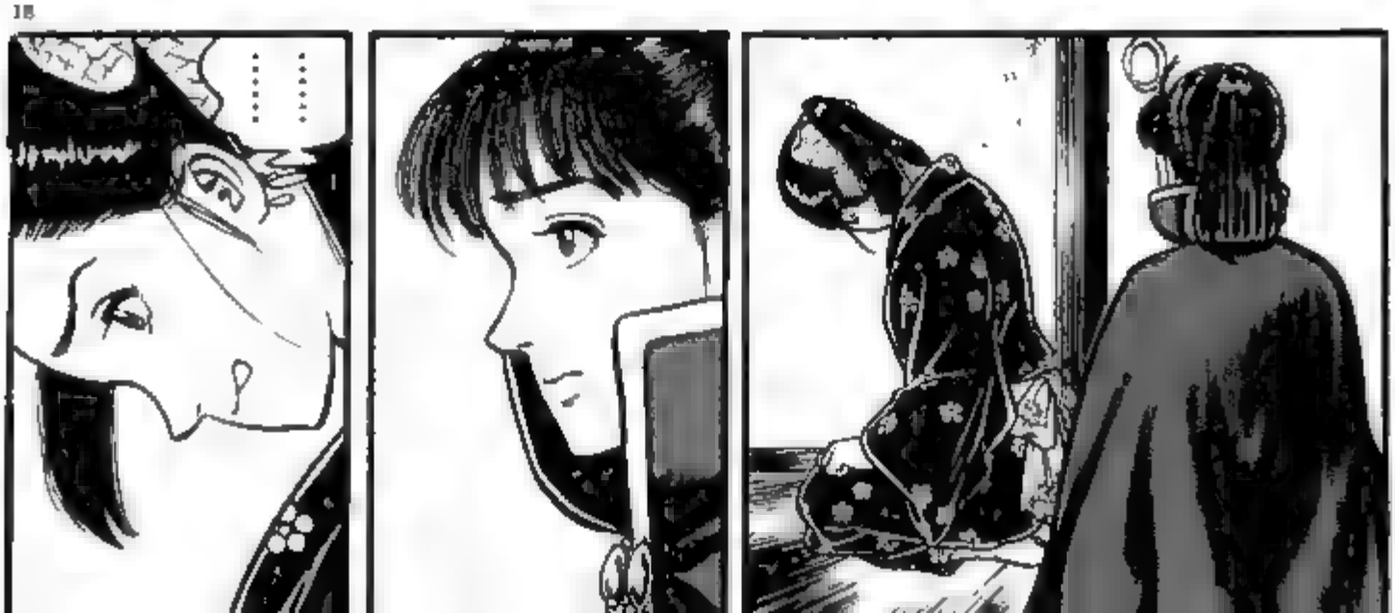
WISHING TO SEE YOU...
WAS THE ONE AND ONLY REASON I HAD TO LIVE AND THAT MADE ME SURVIVE UNTIL NOW

I, THE ONE WHO ONLY COMMITTED CRIMES, KEPT ON SURVIVING...WAS THIS A GOOD THING?
I'VE GOT NO CLUE, BUT...
.....

I HAVE A REASON TO LIVE AGAIN.
NOW...I MET THE MONK WHO WAS LIKE GRAMPA'S HONORED TEACHER.

I CAN'T SAY IT WELL OVERALL, BUT...
I MEAN...
I FELT READY TO GO ON LIVING, BUT...
I WAS GLAD TO BE ALIVE!


IT'S THE TRUTH!
BECAUSE I HAD A REASON TO GO ON LIVING IN ORDER TO SEE YOU!
YAE-CHAN, IT'S THANKS TO YOU THAT I WAS ABLE TO GO ON LIVING AFTER THAT!!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THANK YOU SO MUCH!
I WANTED TO TELL YOU MY FEELINGS BEFORE I LEFT KYŌ, NO MATTER WHAT IT TOOK!
THANK YOU!
THIS IS THE MONEY TO REDEEM YOUR CONTRACT.
LAST TIME...I MADE YOU SO ANGRY...AND I HURT YOU.

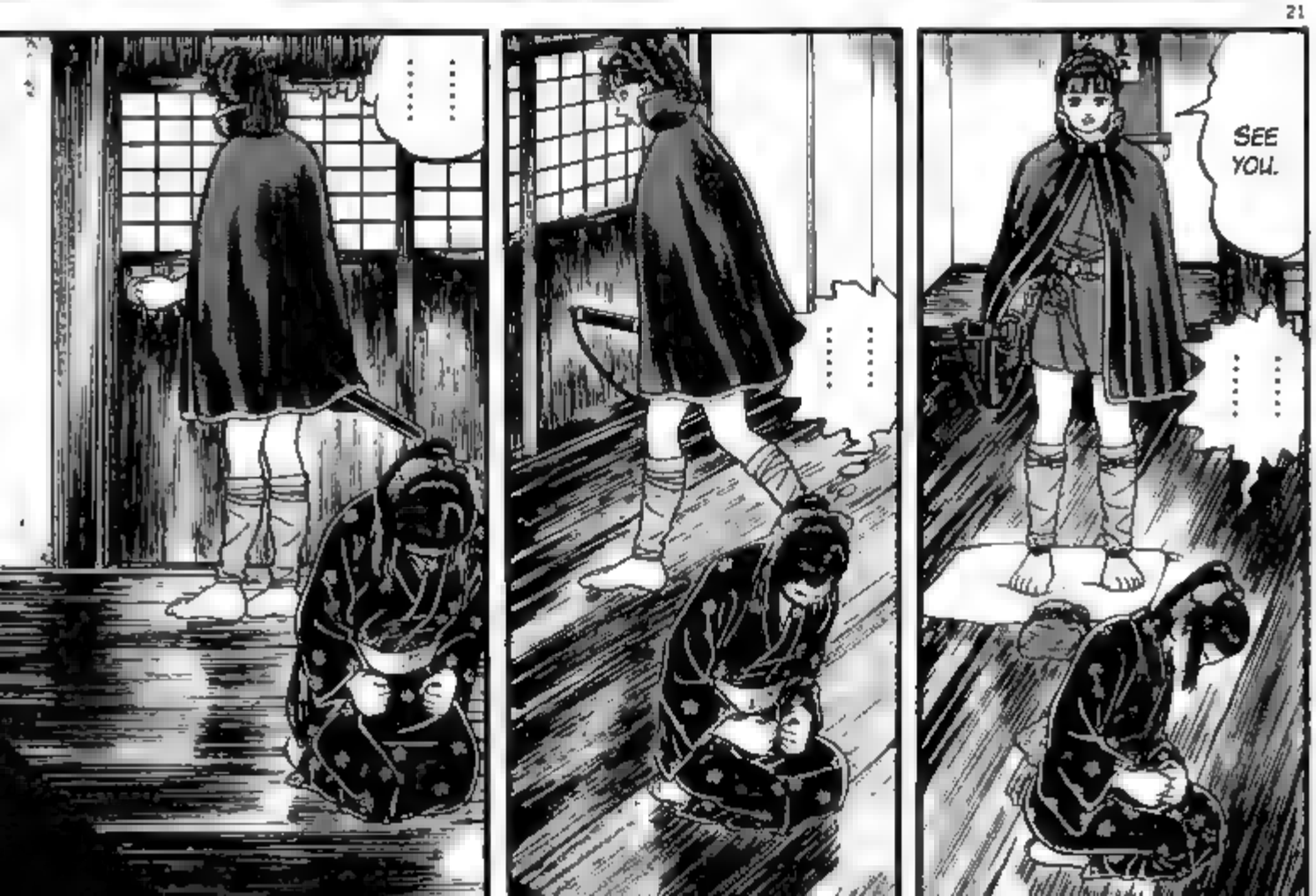
THAT TIME... YOU COMPLETELY MISUNDERSTOOD!
SO I MEAN...
FOM NOW ON, BECAUSE I'M GONNA BE PROTECTED BY GRAMPA'S HONORED TEACHER...THIS MONEY HAS BECOME OF NO FURTHER USE TO ME.
WHAT I MEAN TO SAY IS.

AND EVEN HYŪGA'S FEELINGS...WHO DIED UNABLE TO TELL YOU
IN HERE, ARE MY FEELINGS OF GRATITUDE!
HOW MUCH HE LOVED YOU, YAE-CHAN!

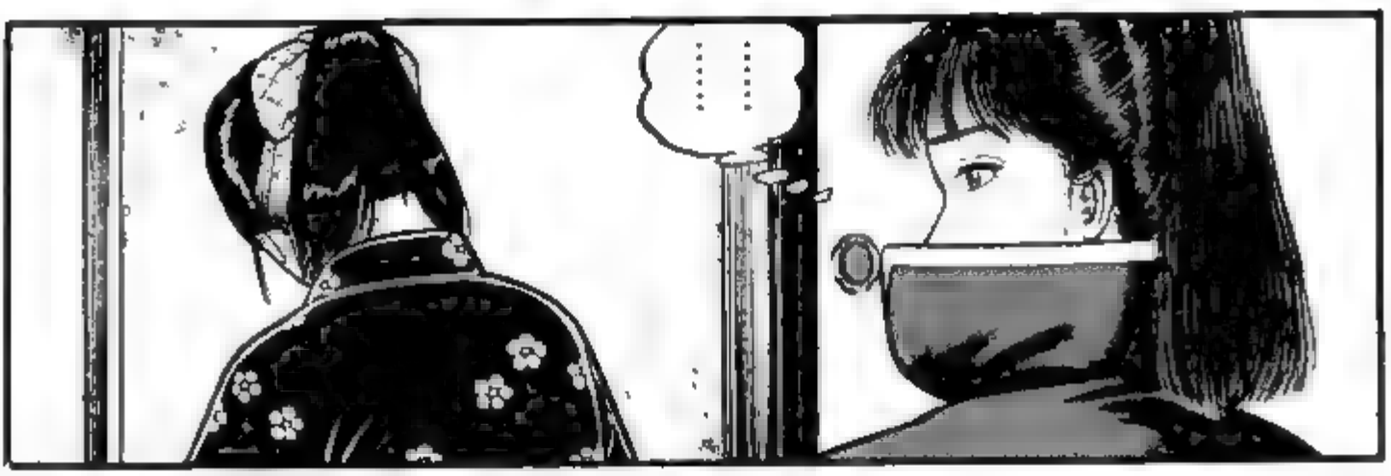
!!

I LEAVE IT HERE FOR YOU.

I WANT YOU TO ON LIVING! FACING FORWARD WITH PRIDE!
BUT...
YOU CAN DO WITH IT WHATEVER YOU WANT, EVEN THROW IT AWAY IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT...


SEE YOU.

WE'LL MEET AGAIN!
I HOPE THAT... ONE DAY...
I WON'T SAY FAREWELL.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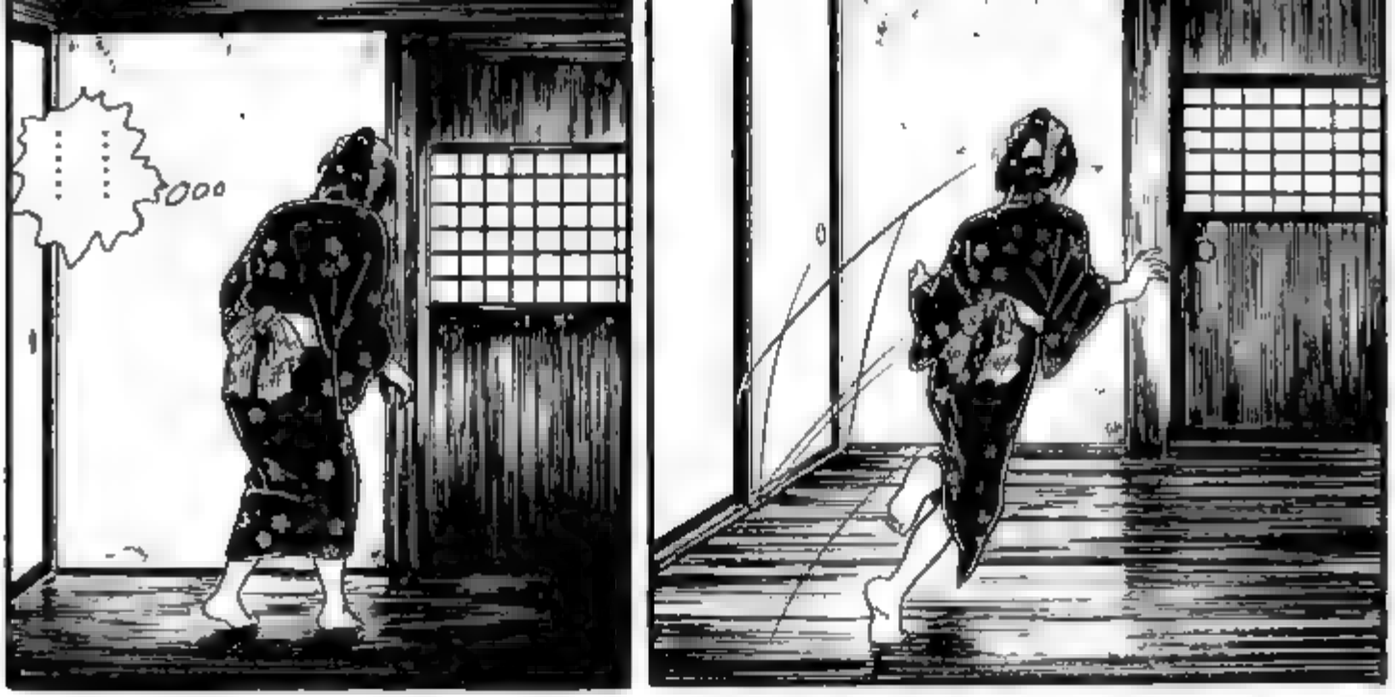
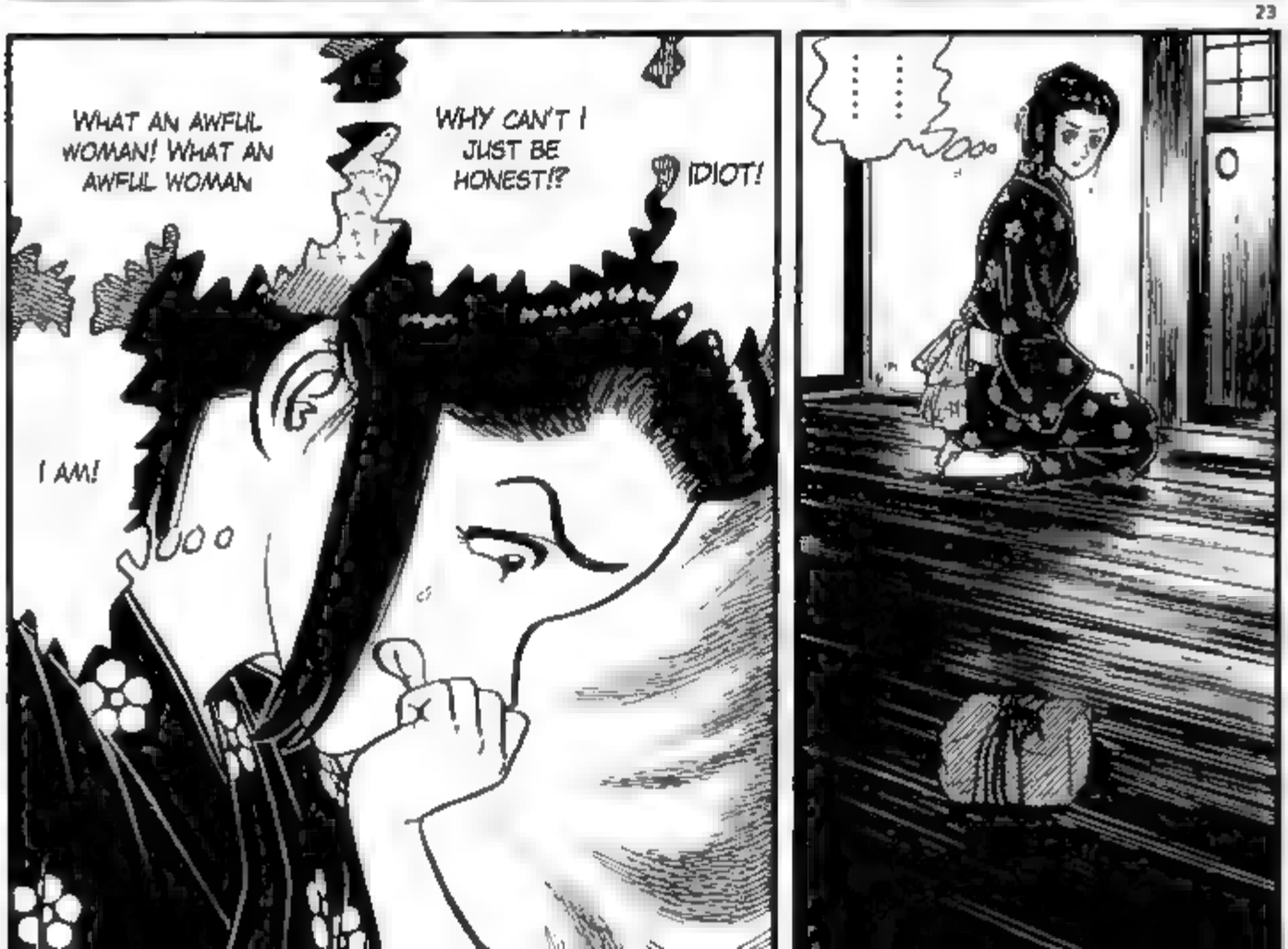
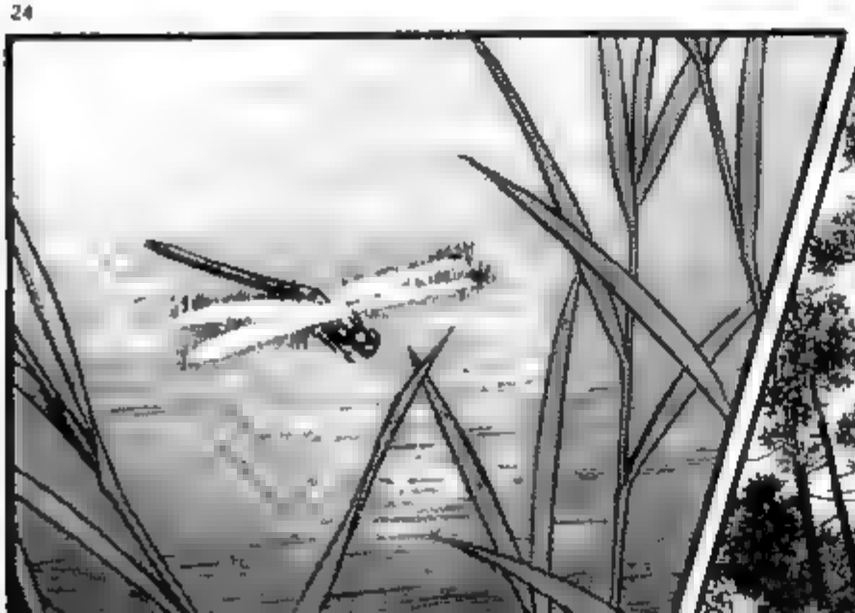
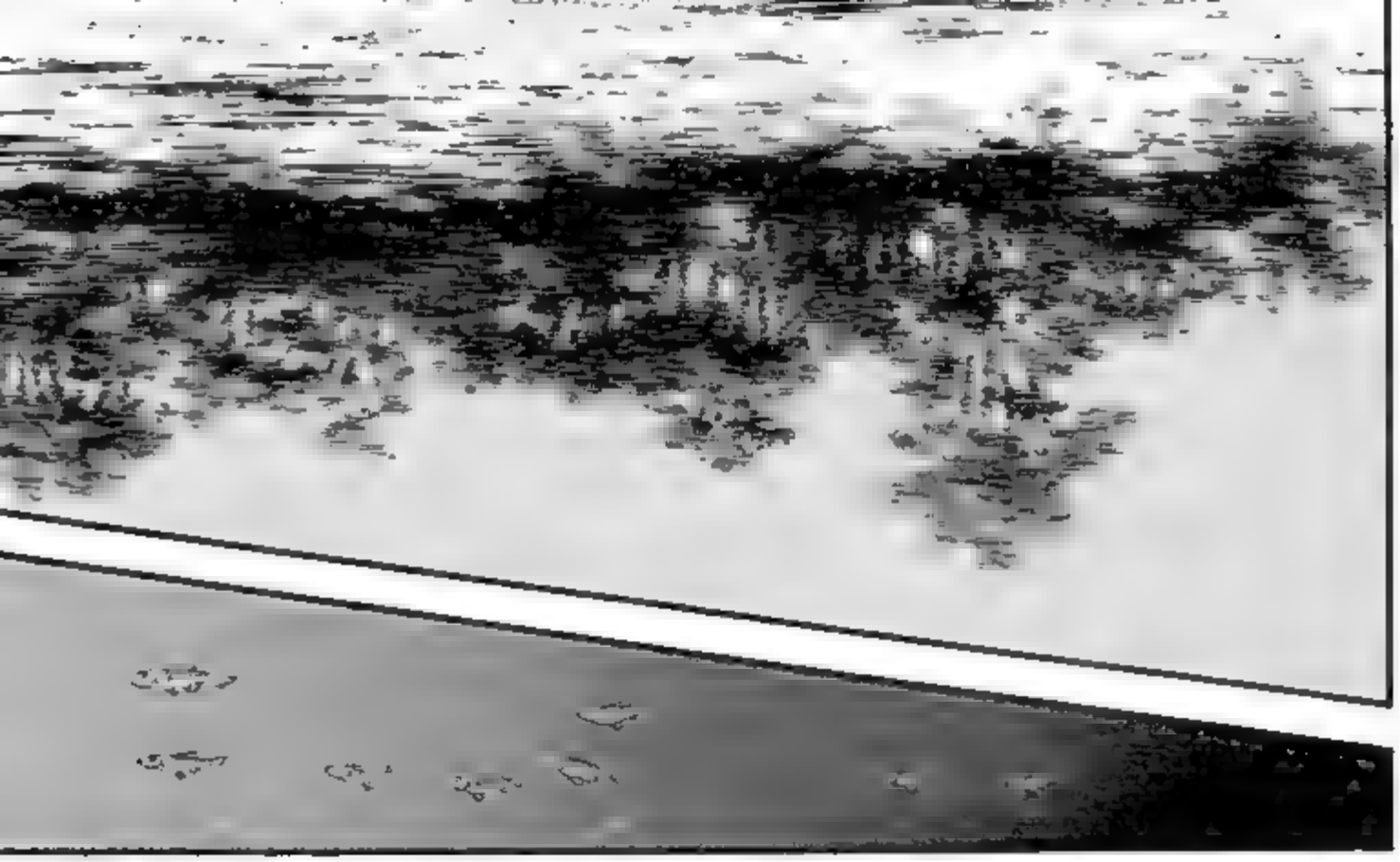
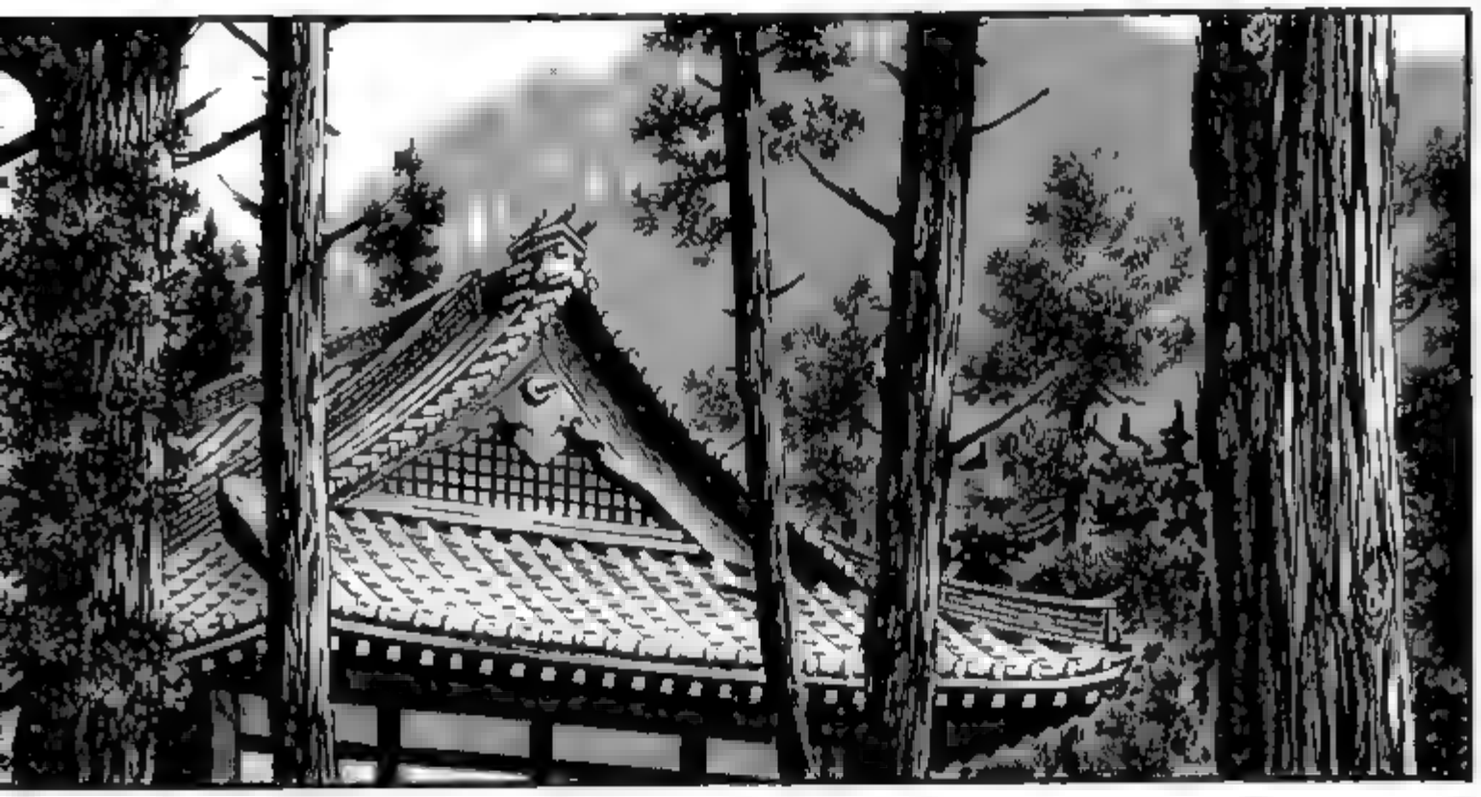


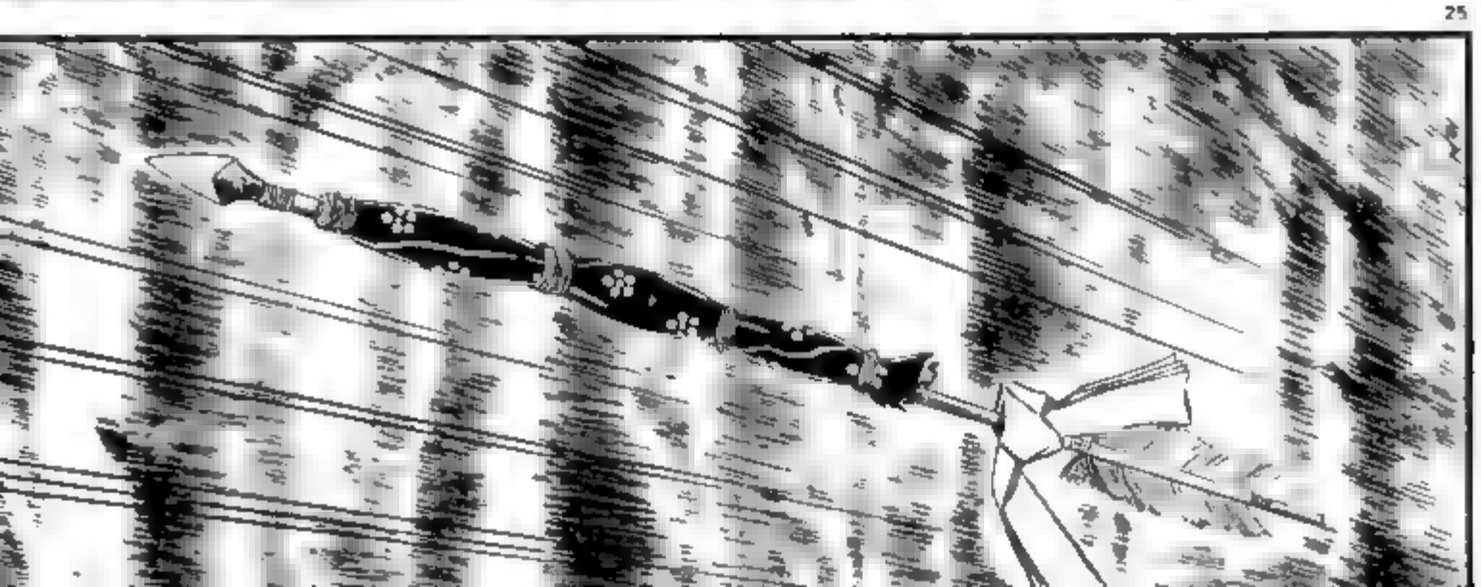

WHAT AN AWFUL WOMAN! WHAT AN AWFUL WOMAN
WHY CAN'T I JUST BE HONEST!?
IDIOT!
I AM!

HYUGA-SAN...
AZUMI-CHAN...
GRAM-PA-SAN...









I SEE!
AZUMI HAS RECEIVED IT...

WILL SHE COME?
IT'S A GIVEN SHE WILL.
SHE EVEN RISKED HERSELF JUST TO MEET WITH HER.
NO WAY WOULD SHE ABANDON
THE LIFE OF THAT PROSTITUTE.

AZUMI!!!!!!!!

I SENT HER ONE SLEEVE OF THAT KIMONO.
IT'LL SURELY CONVINCE HER WE AREN'T BLUFFING.

I'M SO SORRY!
AZUMI-CHAN! AZUMI-CHAN!

YAE-CHAN!

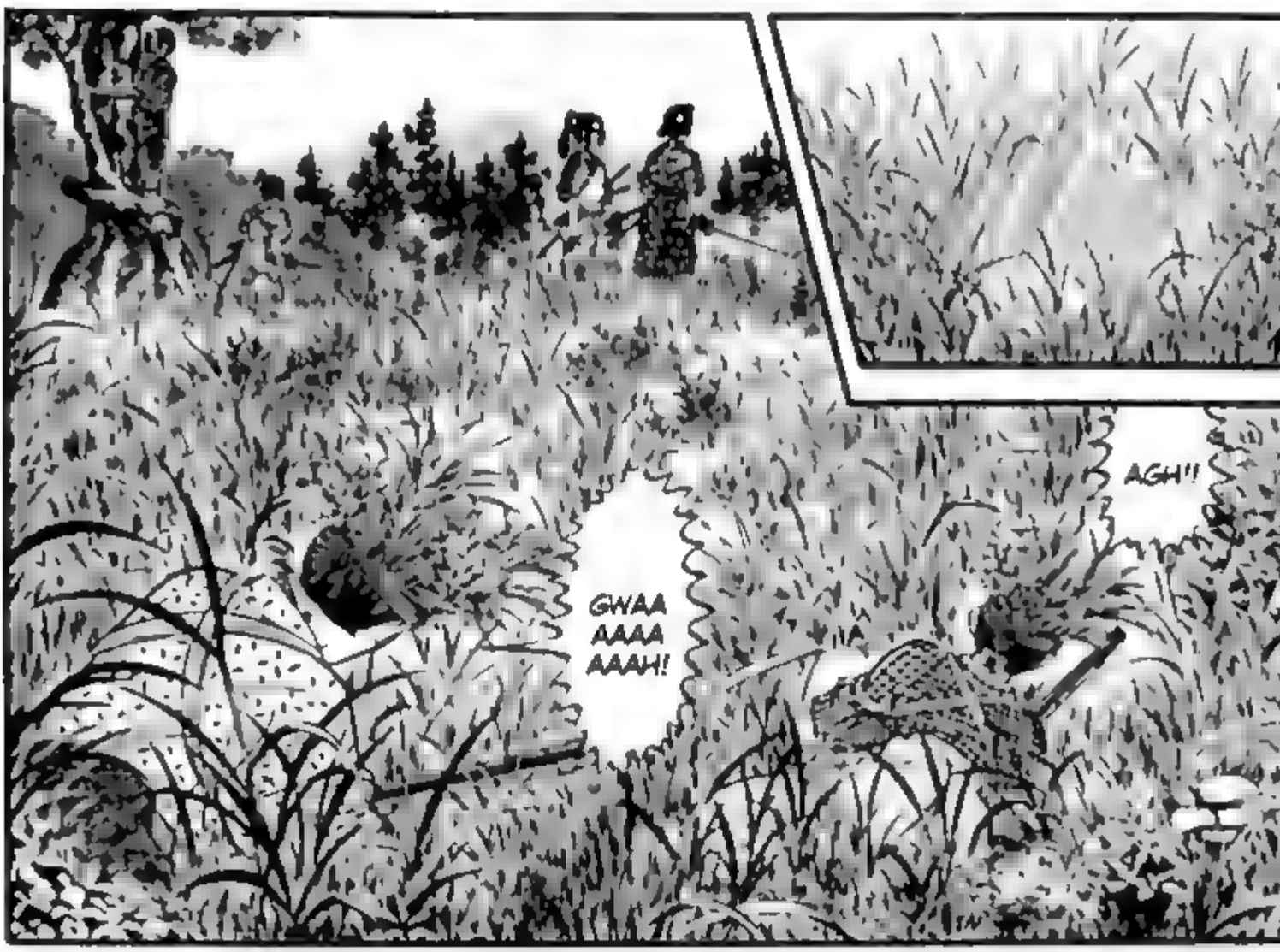
30

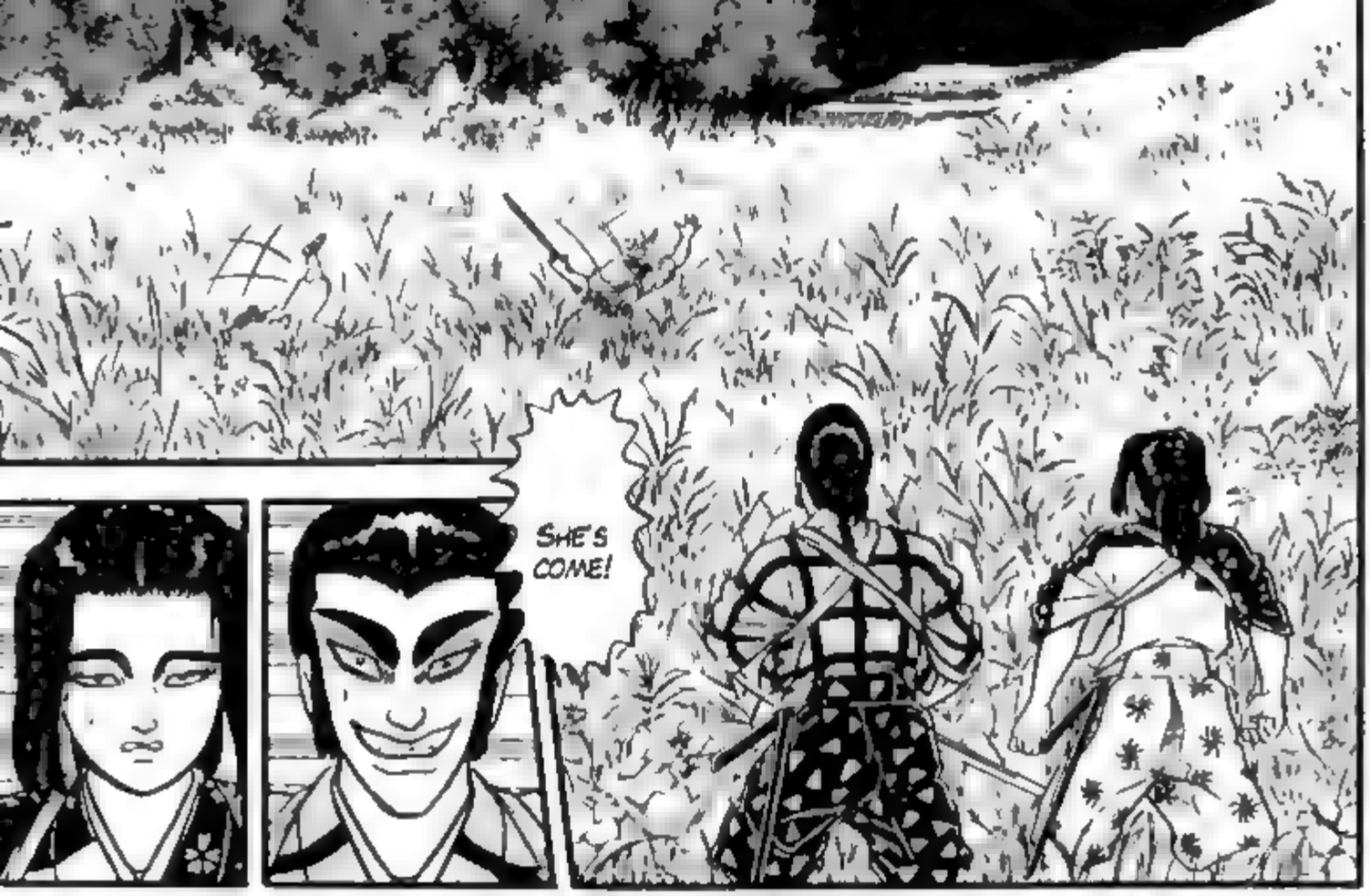
I'LL NEVER FORGIVE THEM IF THEY CAUSE HER
ANY HARM!
I SWEAR...
WHAT A COWARDLY PLAN!

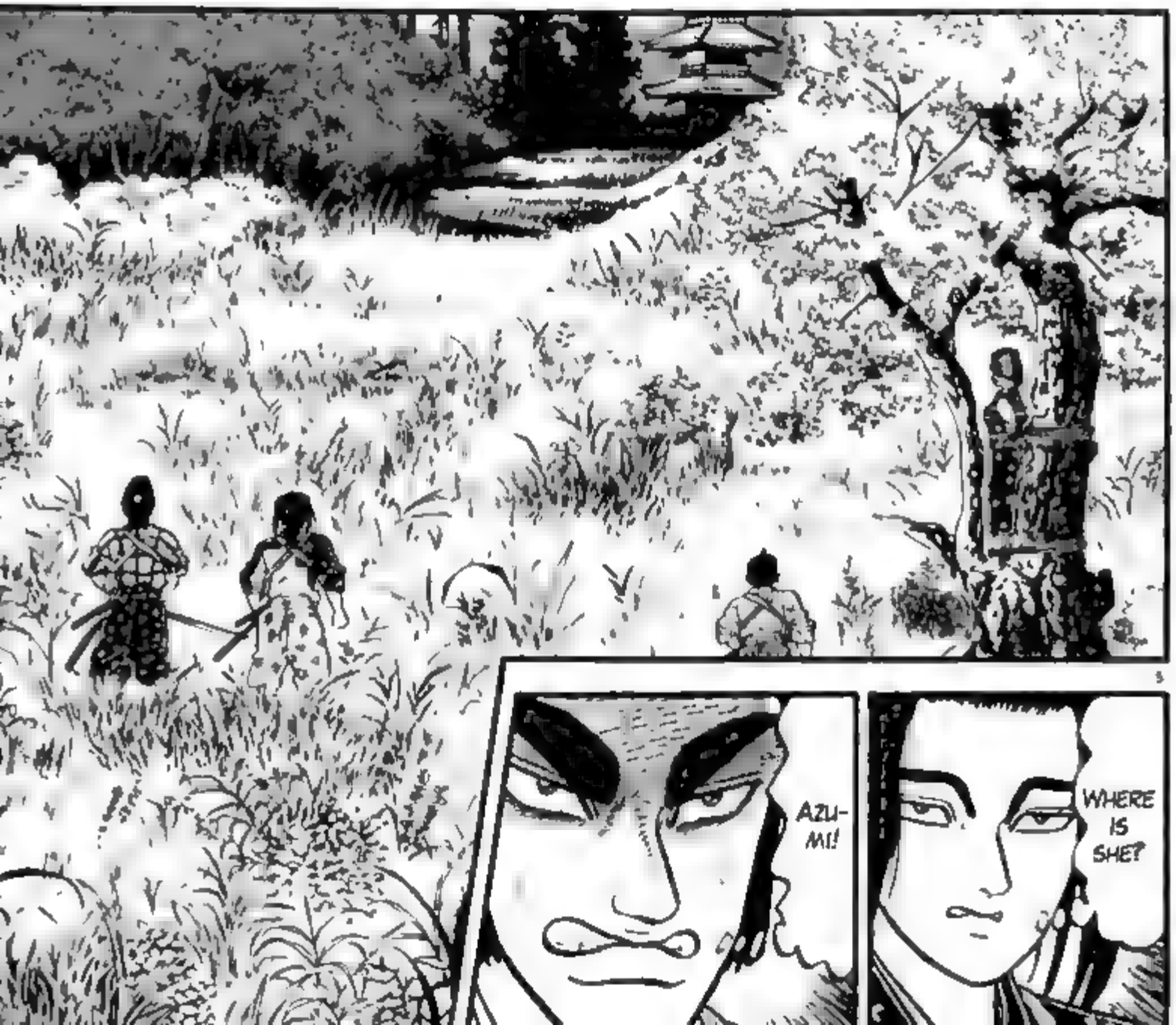
CHAPTER 4: YAE'S DECISION

2

WHAT DO I DO...?
LURKING IN THE GRASS.. WHERE I CAN'T SEE.
3
SHE'S LATE.
.....


GWAA AAAA AAAH!
AGH!!


SHE'S COME!


AZU-MI!
WHERE IS SHE?

IF YOU REFUSE!
AZUM!!!!!! WHERE ARE YOU!? SHOW YOURSELF!!!

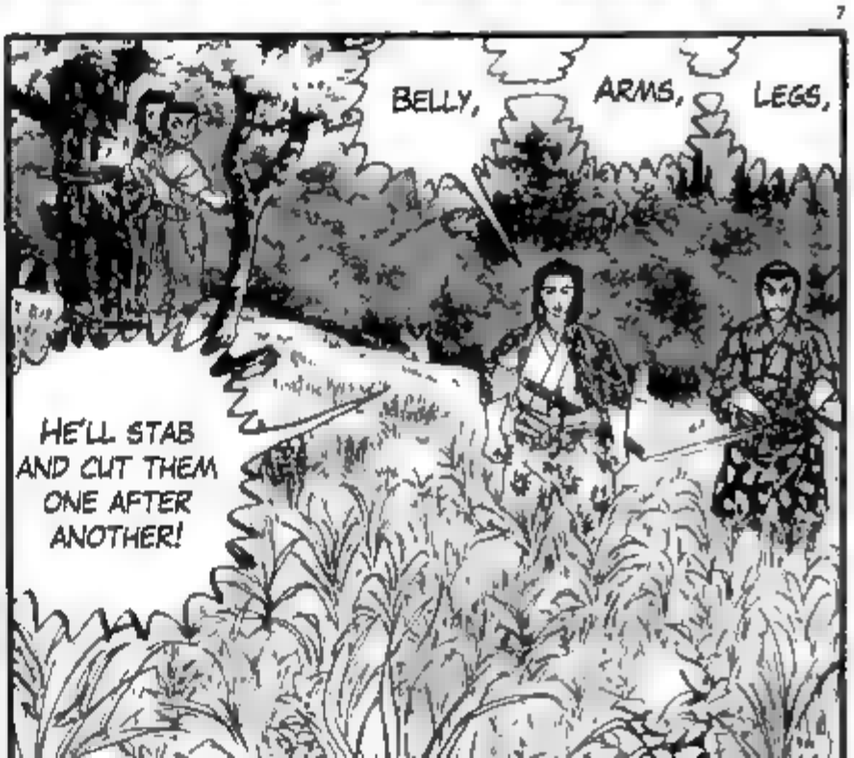
.....
SOMETHING IS GOING TO HAPPEN TO THIS WHORE!

SHAME ON YOU!
WITHOUT GUNS OR A HOSTAGE!?
CAN'T YOU TAKE ME ON

UNTIL YOU SHOW YOUR FACE AND COME OUT HERE....
HE WON'T KILL THE GIRL RIGHT OFF!

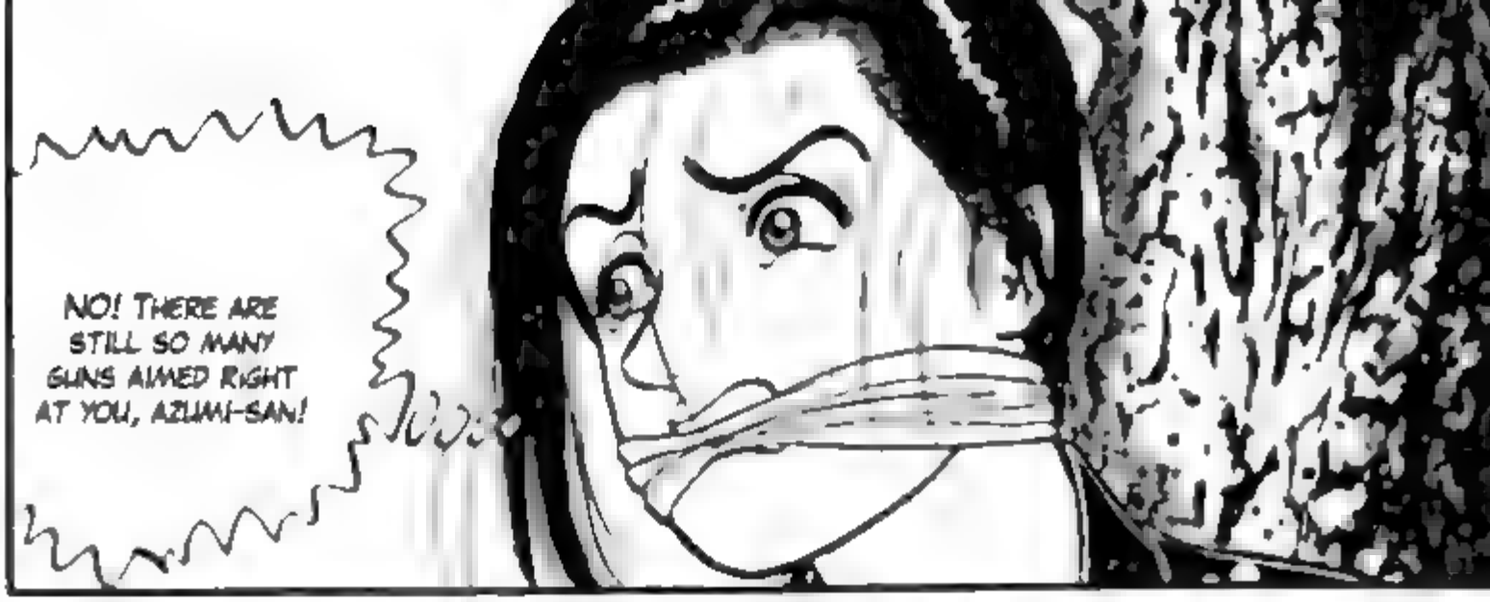
SHOW YOUR FACE!
SHUT YOUR MOUTH!

UH HUH HUH UHU HUHU HUHU!


BELLY,
ARMS,
LEGS,
HE'LL STAB AND CUT THEM ONE AFTER ANOTHER!

カッ!!
6
IIIH EH EH EH, WEEELL THEN, WHERE SHOULD I START FROM?
FIRST OFF, I'LL STAB THESE PALE WHITE LEGS!
WATCH THAT RICH RED BLOOD SPILL OUT!
EEEEH!?

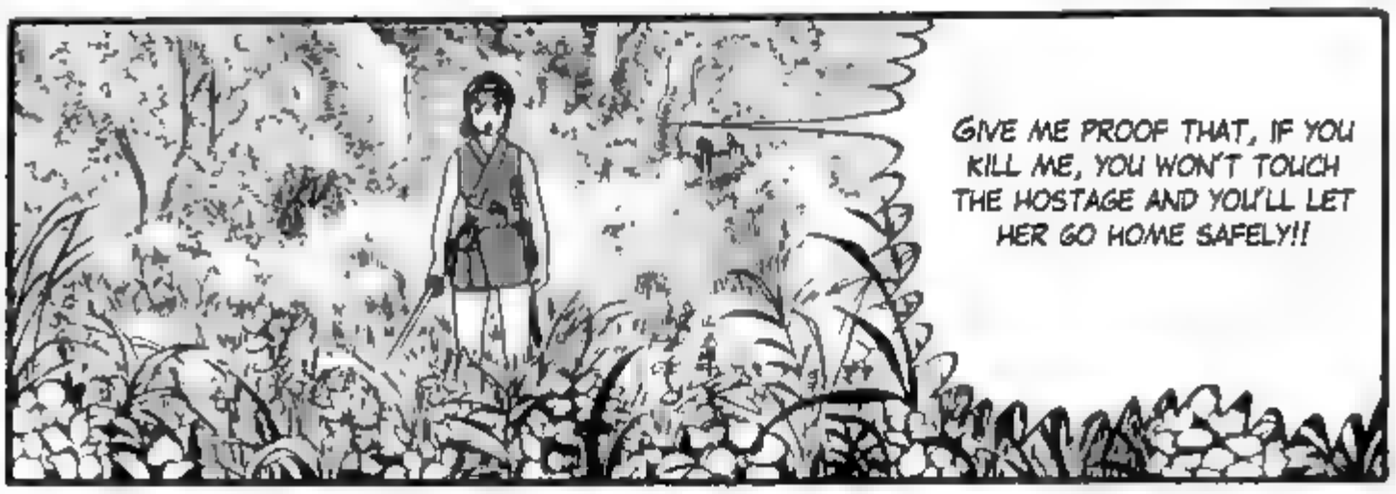
STOP!!
AZUU-
MIII!


NO! THERE ARE STILL SO MANY GUNS AIMED RIGHT AT YOU, AZUMI-SAN!

CAN'T AIM PROPERLY UNTIL SHE DOES
COME CLOSER

……
GET OVER HERE!
WHAT'S WRONG?!
AAAAAH!
AAAAAH!
YOU MUSTN'T COME NEAR ME! YOU'LL BE SHOT!
AAAAAH!
AAAAAH!

WHAT'S WRONG !?
COME OUT AL-READY!


GIVE ME PROOF THAT, IF YOU KILL ME, YOU WON'T TOUCH THE HOSTAGE AND YOU'LL LET HER GO HOME SAFELY!!

WHEN WE SETTLE WITH YOU, THE HOSTAGE WILL BE SAFE!
YOU'RE OUR ONLY TARGET!
WHAAAAAAAT !?
12
I WONDER ABOUT THAT!

YOU TOOK A HOSTAGE, AND WHAT'S MORE, YOU USED A RIFLE SQUAD TO SHOOT ME!
BUT YOU'RE CRAVENS!
I'LL NEVER TURN DOWN A FAIR CHANCE TO CROSS SWORDS!

ZZZZZZZZ-!

I CAN'T TRUST THOSE WORDS COMING FROM SOME COWARDS WHO LOST PRIDE IN THEIR SWORDS!!

CUT THE ROPES AND SET HER FREE!
I'LL FACE YOU!

USE AS PROOF THEN!?
WHAT SHOULD WE

DON'T YOU REALIZE THE SITUATION!?
AZUMI!
FU HAH HAH HAH!
AS IF YOU WERE IN A POSITION TO BARGAIN HERE!

OR HE'LL SKEWER THAT WHORE'S LEGS!
GET OVER HERE!

.....

YOU CAN'T RISK YOUR LIFE FOR SOMEONE LIKE ME!!!
NOOO!!! STAY AWAY!
AAAAAH!
AHH!
AAAH!

I WON'T DIE SO EASILY!
YAE-CHAN, IT'S FINE!! I KNOW THAT THE RIFLE SQUAD IS STILL AIMING AT ME,
I'LL SAVE YOU WITHOUT FAIL!

あがあー
AAAAH!
おうおうおう
AHH!

COME CLOSER!
COME!

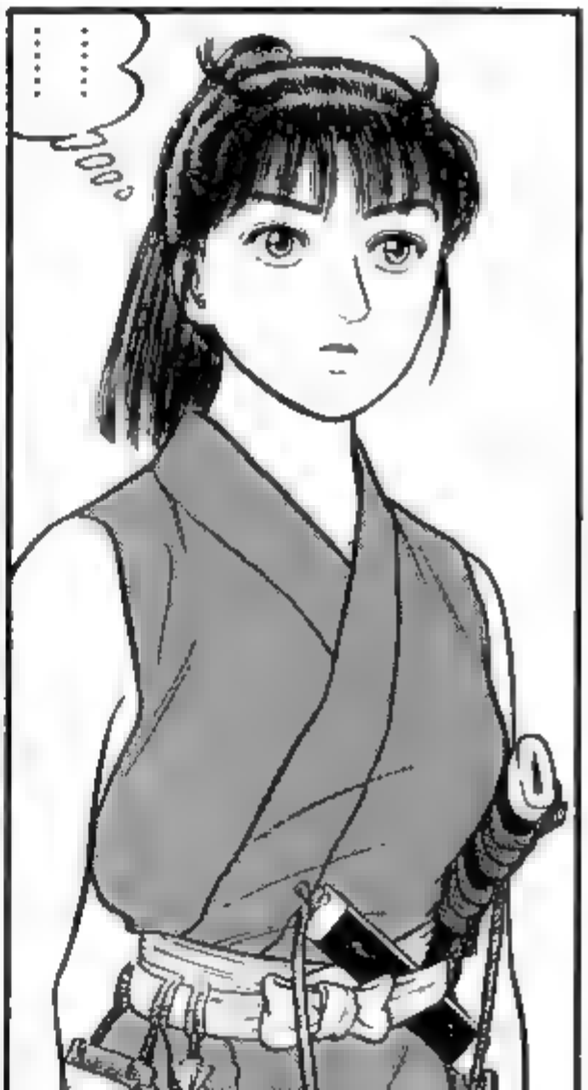
CLOSER!

あが
あああ
あが
はあ
あああ
あが
IT'S ALRIGHT! I'M GOING TO SAVE YOU!
WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO SAY, YAE-CHAN!?
あが
……
あが
あ、
あ!
IF THAT WHORE IS ENOUGH FOR HER TO THROW AWAY HER LIFE...
UNFASTEN HER GAG.
FINE.
LET THEM EXCHANGE SOME FINAL WORDS!

AZUMI-CHAN IS... VITAL TO THIS COUNTRY..
SHE MUST NOT DIE!
SHE ABSOLUTELY CANNOT DIE SACRIFICING HERSELF...
FOR SOMEONE LIKE ME!

THANK YOU!
FOR SOMEONE LIKE ME!
AZUMI-CHAN, THANK YOU!

I BEG YOU!
RUN AWAAAAAY!


.....

AAAH!

ズッ
ズッ
ダッ

AZUMI !!!!
JUST WHO THE HELL ARE YOU!?

ヒュッ

AZUMI! LEAVE THIS ONE TO ME!
TEND TO YAE! QUICKLY!

GWAAAAA
AAAOHHH!
ヒュー

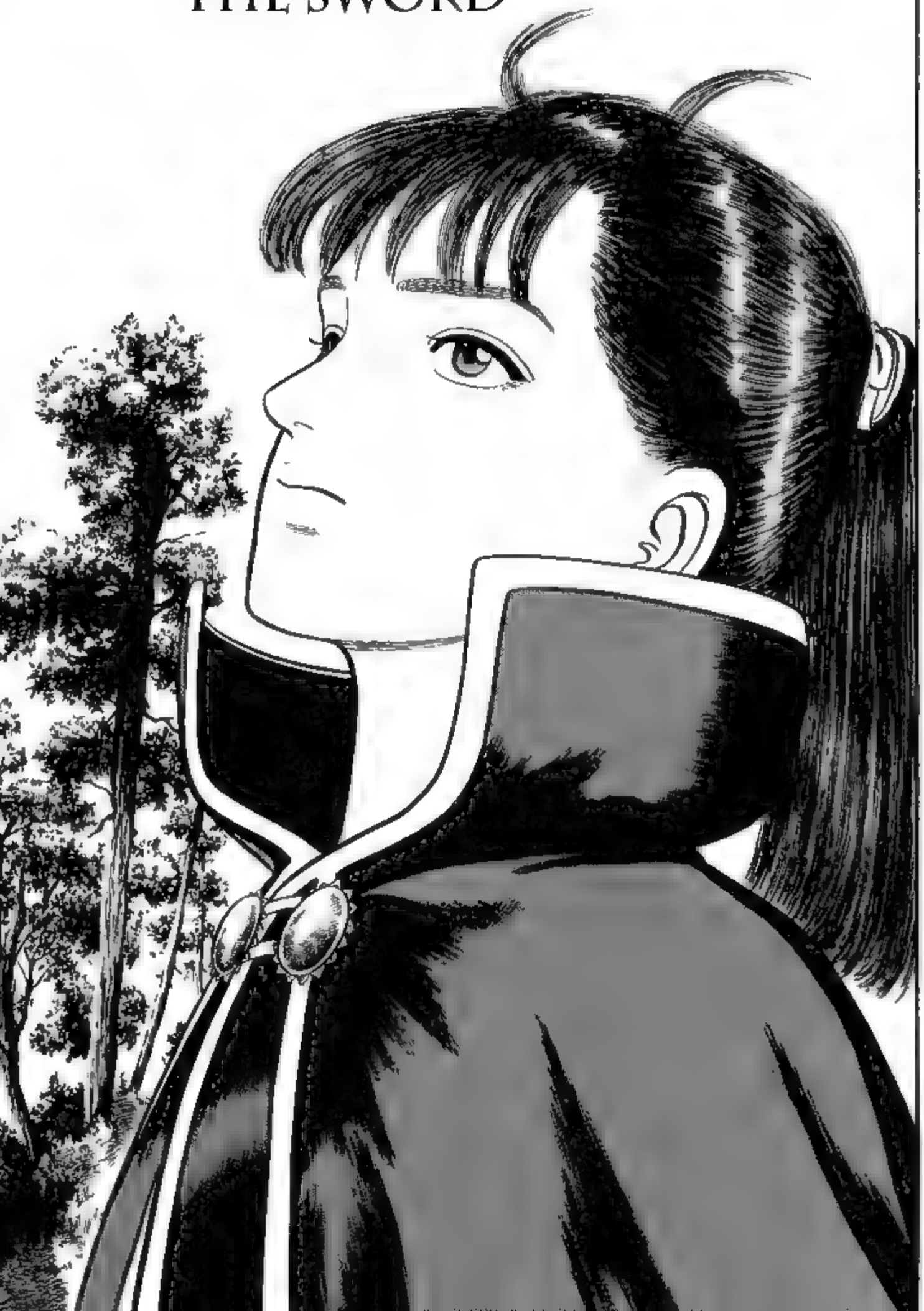
ヒュザ
ザ…

チャン
ヒュザ
ザッ

チャン

WHEN BITING OFF THE TONGUE, THE REMAINING PIECE ROLLS UP INTO THE THROAT, OBSTRUCTING THE AIR PASSAGE CAUSING DEATH BY SUFFOCATION...IT'S A PAINFUL WAY TO DIE...
YAE-CHAN!!!
.....
ゲッ
ゲッ
ウゲッ

CHAPTER 5: BECAUSE OF THE SWORD



ウゲッ
ゲッ

OH, THANK GOD! YOU DIDN'T BITE IT OFF!

AH!

2

YOU DIDN'T BITE YOUR TONGUE OFF!! IT WAS JUST WOUNDED A BIT, SO IF YOU CALM DOWN AND KEEP QUIET, THE BLOOD WILL STOP SOON!!!
YAE-CHAN, EVERYTHING IS FINE! JUST CALM DOWN!

SHE DIDN'T BITE IT OFF?
YOU'RE GONNA BE FINE, YAE-CHAN!
IT'S OKAY!
.....

I'M SO SORRY, AZUMI-CHAN.
THANK YOU.

IT PROBABLY HURTS, BUT...DON'T WORRY, THE BLOOD WILL GRADUALLY STOP.
.....

I'M SO SORRY...FOR SOMEONE LIKE ME...YOU...
IT'S FINE, PLEASE ALLOW IT
IT'S BETTER IF YOU DON'T TALK.

NOW, IT'S DONE.
SOONER OR LATER, I'D HAVE HAD TO SETTLE THINGS DOWN WITH THESE HATAMOTO.

I'M SO TRULY... SORRY!

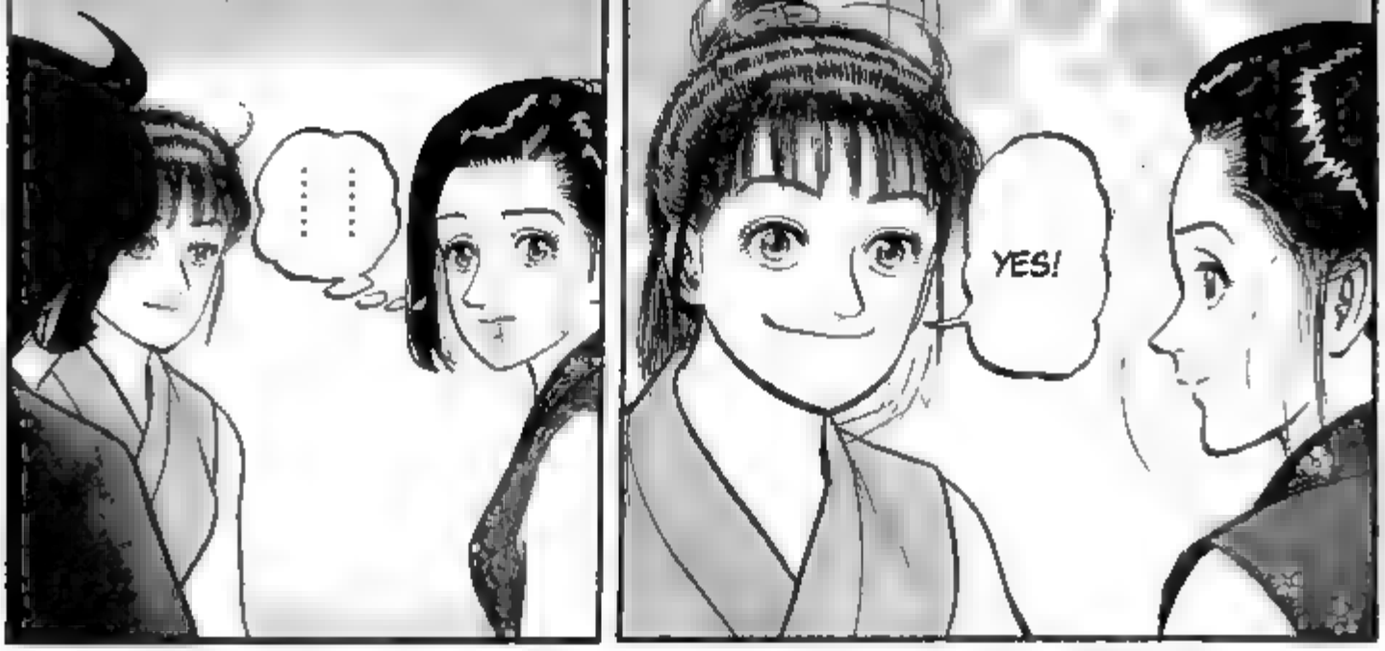
.....
IT'S MERELY THAT I'M CONSTANTLY CHASING YOUR BACK.

I HADN'T EXPECTED HELP FROM YOU.
AND THANK YOU, SAKON.

.....
.....
.....
FOR SOMEONE OF MY FINANCIAL STANDING, IT'S EMBARASSING THAT I COULD DO ONLY THIS MUCH, BUT
YAE. ,
MY APOLOGY FOR THE PAIN I CAUSED YOUR HEART.
AH?
THIS IS THE DEED. PLEASE TAKE IT.
I'VE LOWERED YOUR DEBT AS MUCH AS I COULD.
.....
.....

SOB.
.....
I... I...
AREN'T YOU GLAD, YAE-CHAN?
THANK YOU. . FOR A WOMAN LIKE ME...
SAKON-SAMA... AZUMI-CHAN...

I'LL GO ON LIVING, FACING STRAIGHT AHEAD!
AND JUST LIKE YOU TOLD ME, AZUMI-CHAN,
I'LL STOP SELLING MY BODY.
EH?
I TOOK A CLEAR RESOLUTION...


.....
YES!

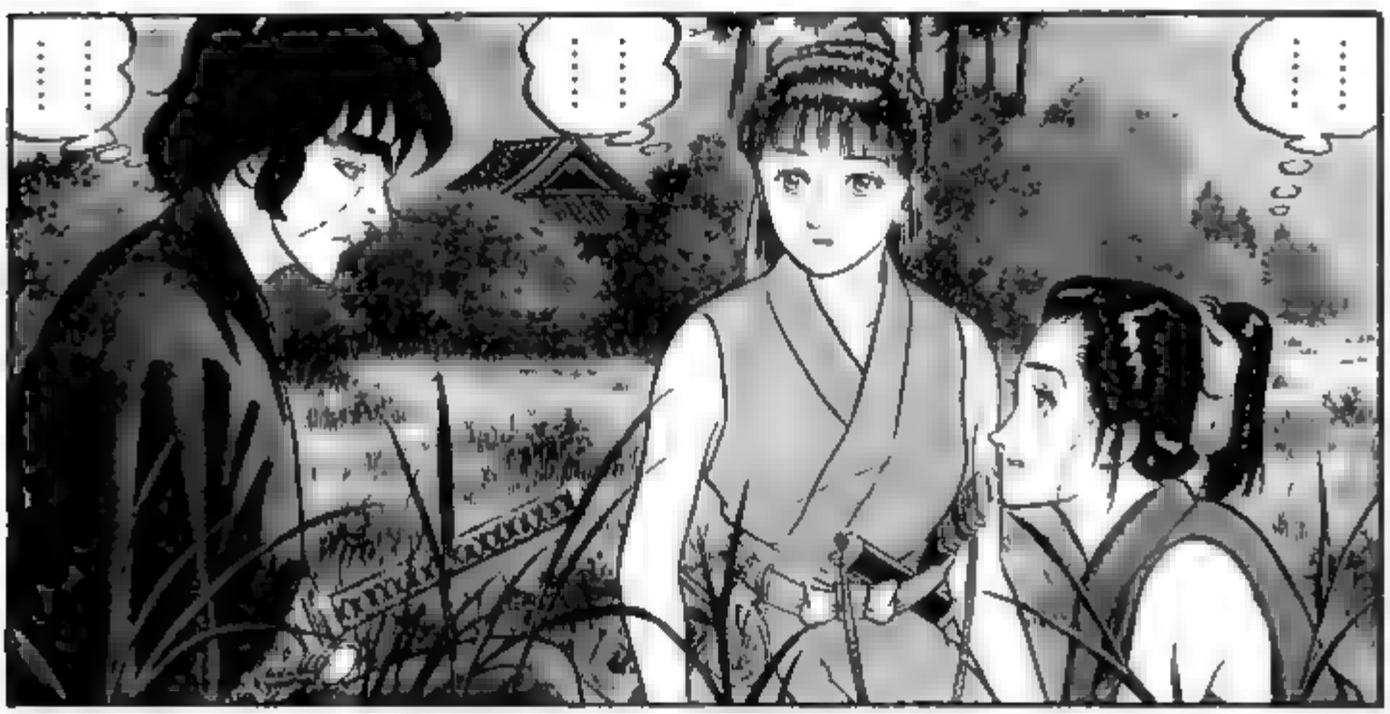
I'M GOING TO QUIT BEING A PROST-ITUTE!
TOMO-RROW,
AND EVEN A LOT OF MONEY FROM AZUMI-CHAN AS WELL.
I'VE RECEIVED SUCH HELP FROM SAKON-SAMA.

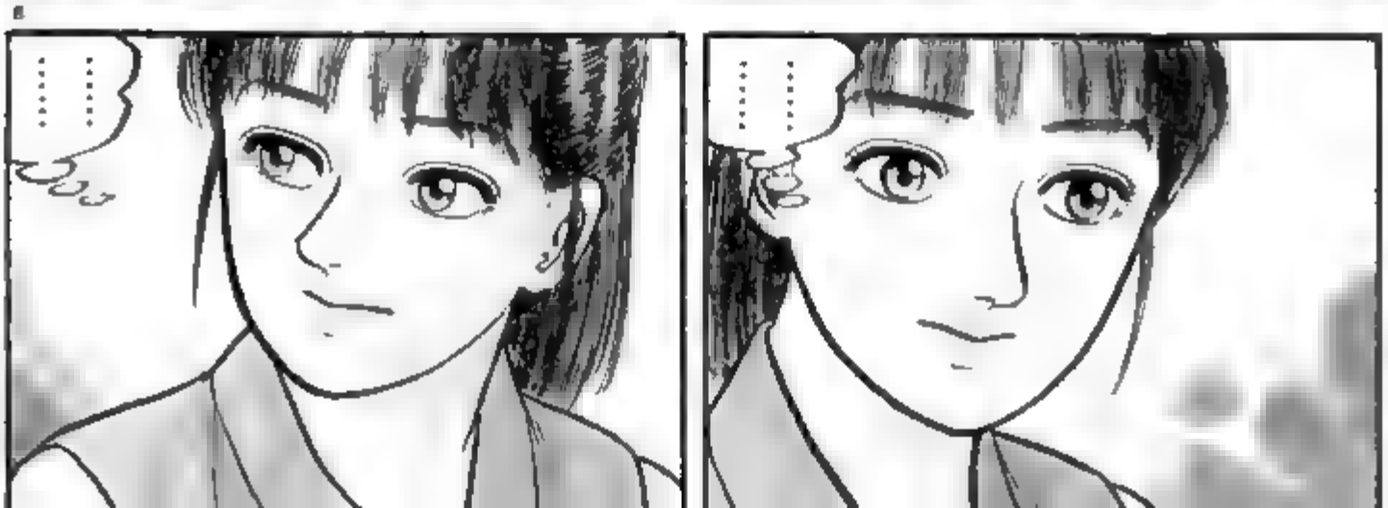
.....

SAKON-SAMA ...

YES!
YES!

SAKON-SAMA. PLEASE ALLOW ME TO SHARE THE TIME YOU HAVE LEFT WITH YOU!
PLEASE, LET ME CARE FOR YOUR ILLNESS.
YOU'RE THE FIRST MAN I'VE EVER LOVED FROM THE BOTTON OF MY HEART!
I DON'T MIND IF AZUMI-CHAN IS IN YOUR HEART ..





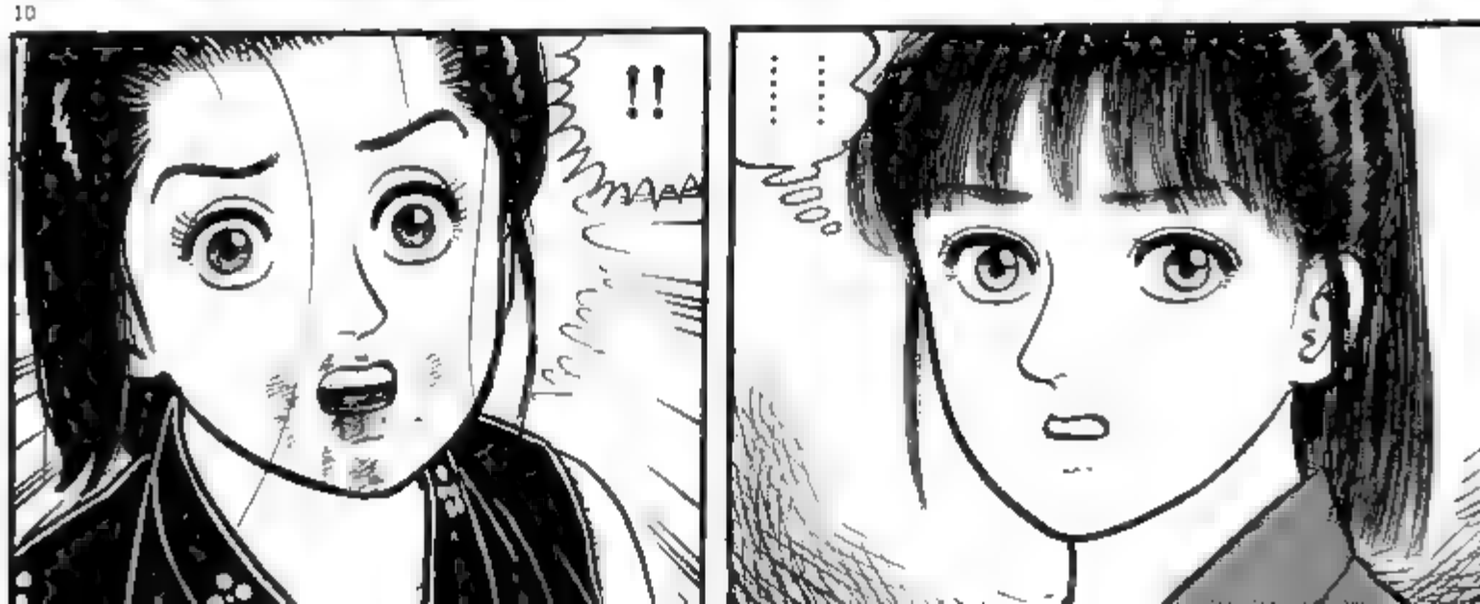
THAT'S GOOD...I'M GLAD FOR THEM.

THAT IS WHY...
SAKON.
YAE-CHAN.
I WON'T ..

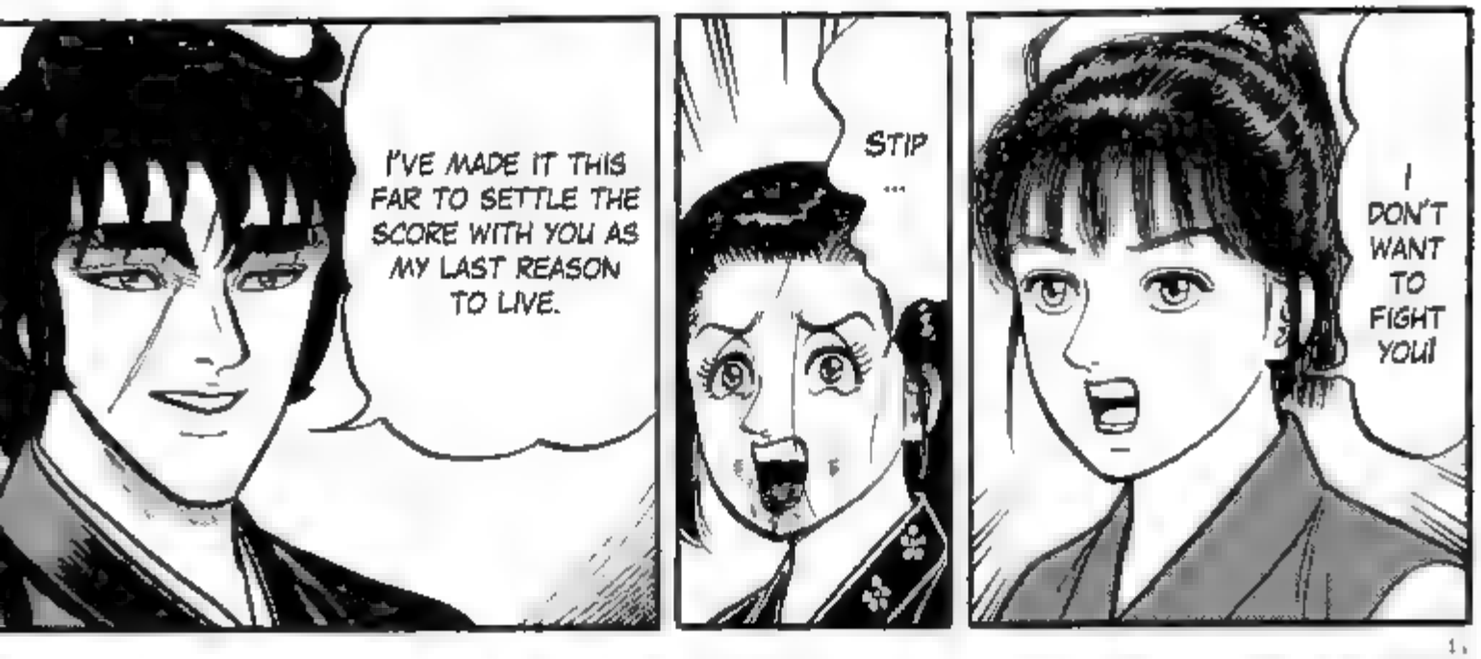
I DID SNEAK AWAY IN SECRET TO COME HERE...THEY'RE PROBABLY SEARCHING FOR ME AT THE TEMPLE IN AN UTTER PANIC...SO I'VE GOTTA GO.

ARE YOU... LEAVING KYŌ?
WITH TENKAI?
I AM.
WHEN?
MAYBE TOMORROW.

THEN.
IT'S NOW OR NEVER.
AZUMI!
LET'S FINISH WHAT REMAINS BETWEEN US!

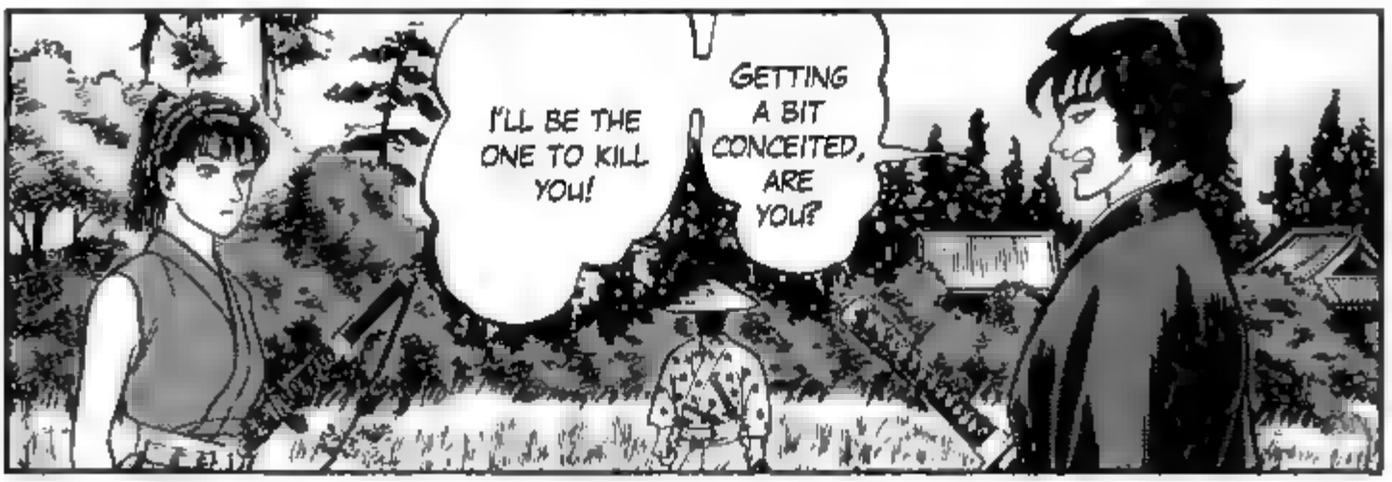

!!
.....

I ONLY HAVE NOW TO SETTLE THINGS WITH YOU.
SAKON... I DON'T WANT TO.


I'VE MADE IT THIS FAR TO SETTLE THE SCORE WITH YOU AS MY LAST REASON TO LIVE.
STIP ...
I DON'T WANT TO FIGHT YOU!

PLEASE STOP THIS! SAKON-SAMA... I BEG OF YOU!

I HAVE NO DESIRE TO KILL YOU!
FACE ME!
ACCEPT YAE-CHAN'S FEELINGS. AND WITH HER-


I'LL BE THE ONE TO KILL YOU!
GETTING A BIT CONCEITED, ARE YOU?

YOU'RE MAKING A MISTAKE IF YOU THINK I'M LESS SKILLED JUST BECAUSE I'M SICK!
STOP IT!

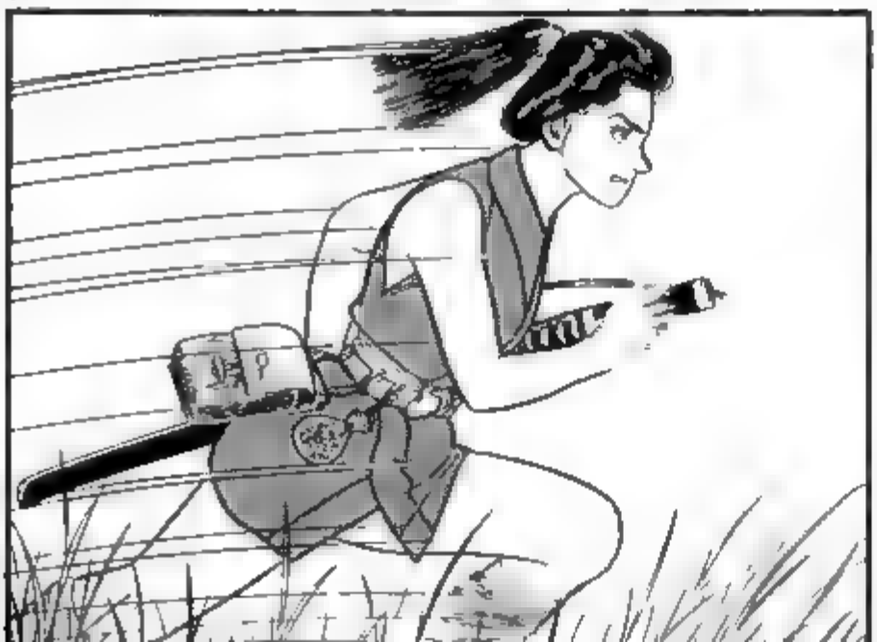
THE MOMENT THAT I DIE AS A SWORDSMAN... IS GROWING CLOSER AND CLOSER...
IN OTHER WORDS.
THAT'S WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN.
BUT THE MORE I GO ON...

SAKON!
PLEASE! I BEG YOU! JUST STOP!
STOP THIS!
AZUMI!
I'LL TAKE YOU, THE WOMAN I LOVE, TO THE OTHER SIDE WITH ME!
HOWEVER.. I WILL NOT DIE ALONE!

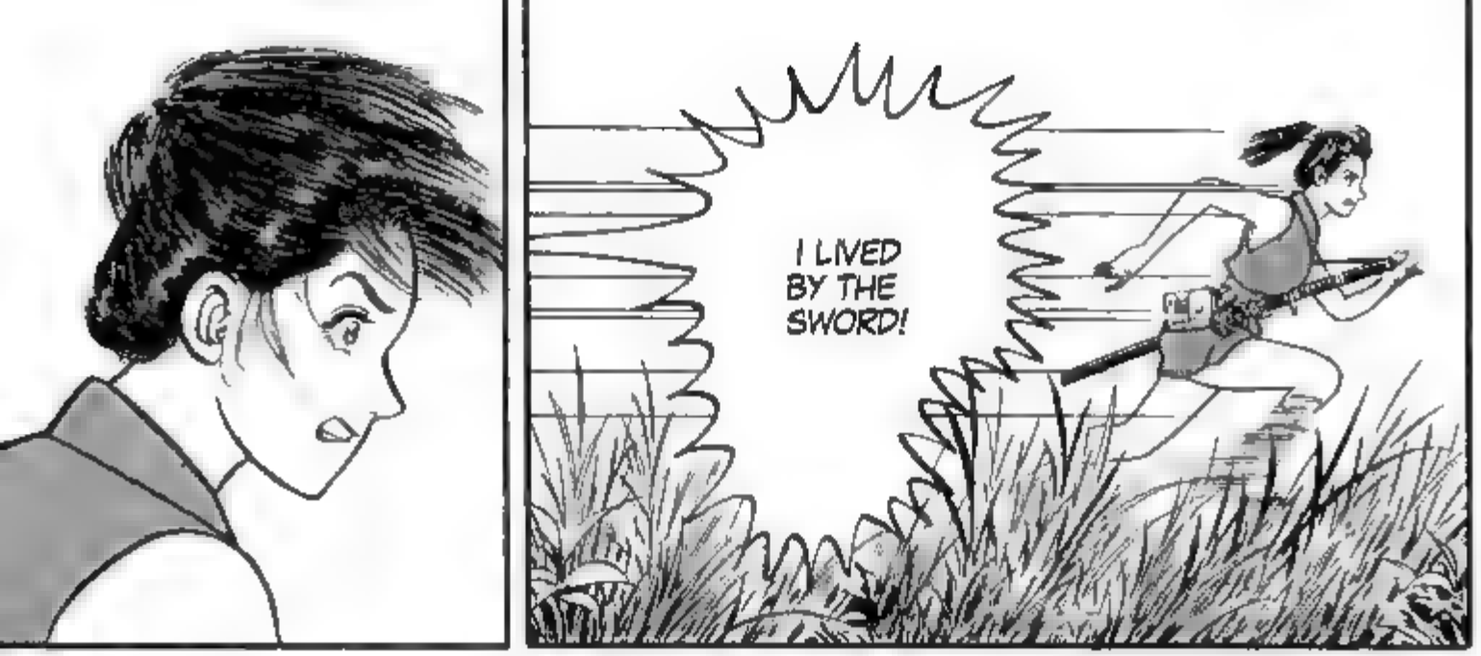
YOU SHOULD SPEND YOUR FINAL DAYS WITH YAE-CHAN!
BECAUSE OF YOUR LUNGS ILLNESS, YOUR LIFE WON'T LAST LONG...
SAKON, PLEASE !!
I'LL KILL YOU AND FOLLOW YOU TO DEATH!

SAKON-SAMA!
I DEMAND YOU FIGHT ME AS A WARRIOR!
I WILL NOT FIGHT!

SO FACE ME!!!!
A DUEL WITH YOU IS MY FINAL WISH AS A SWORDSMAN!
PLEASE!!! WITH YAE-CHAN!
I BEG OF YOU!



I REF-USE!


I LIVED BY THE SWORD!

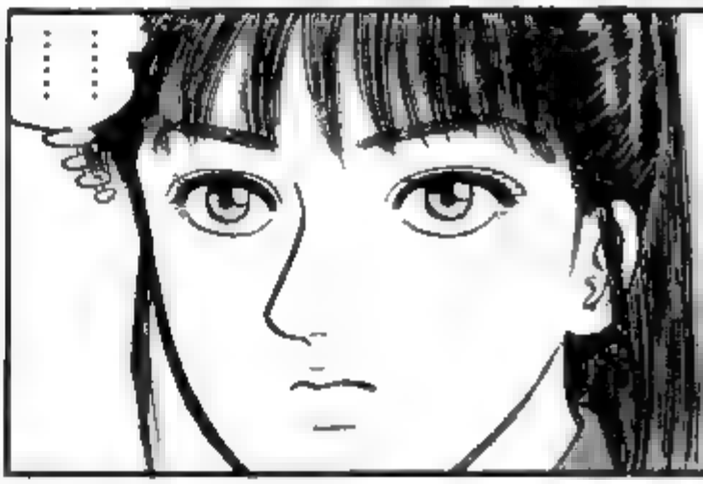
I LIVED HONESTLY... ALL MY LIFE... BY THE SWORD.

.....

HOW COULD I DIE TO AN ILLNESS OR TO ANYTHING ELSE?!

.....

.....


.....

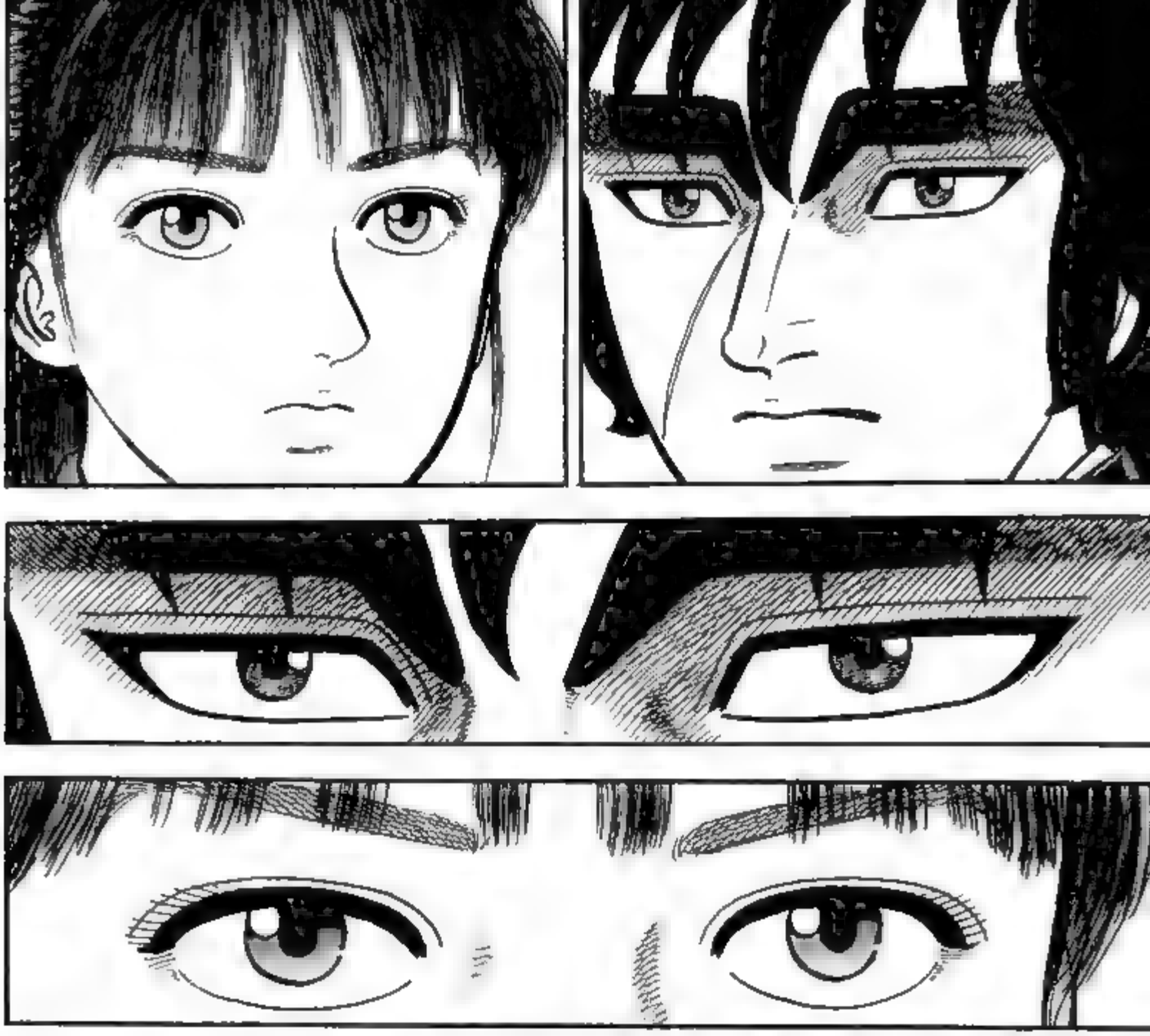
PLEASE...PLEASE STOP THIS!

AND YOU.. AZUMI-CHAN... STOP IT...

STEP AWAY, YAE.

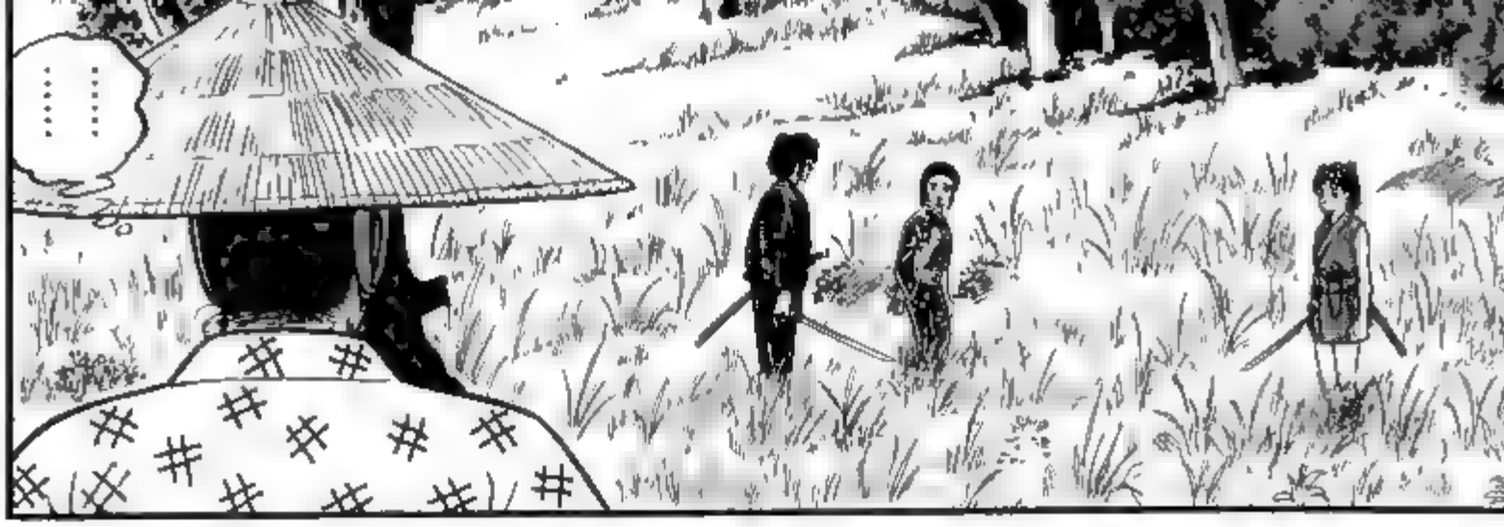
I BEG YOU! IT'S THE ONLY THING I'LL EVER ASK!

.....



I WON'T GIVE YOU TO TENKAI AND LET YOU LEAVE ME BEHIND!

SAKON
..
.....
MY AZUMI.
YOU ARE MINE!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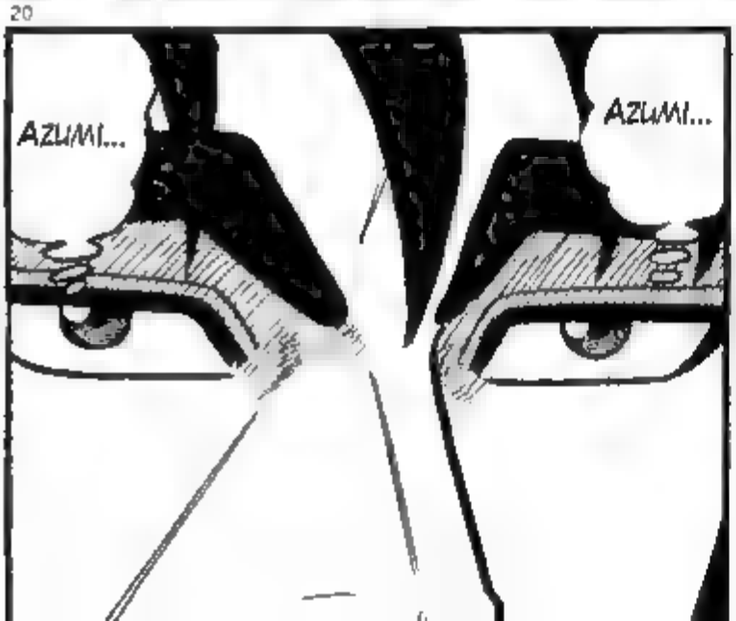
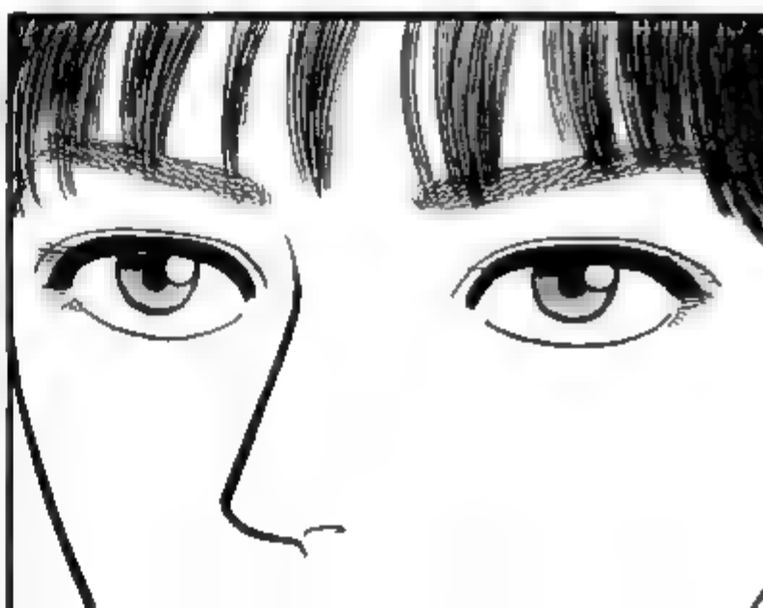
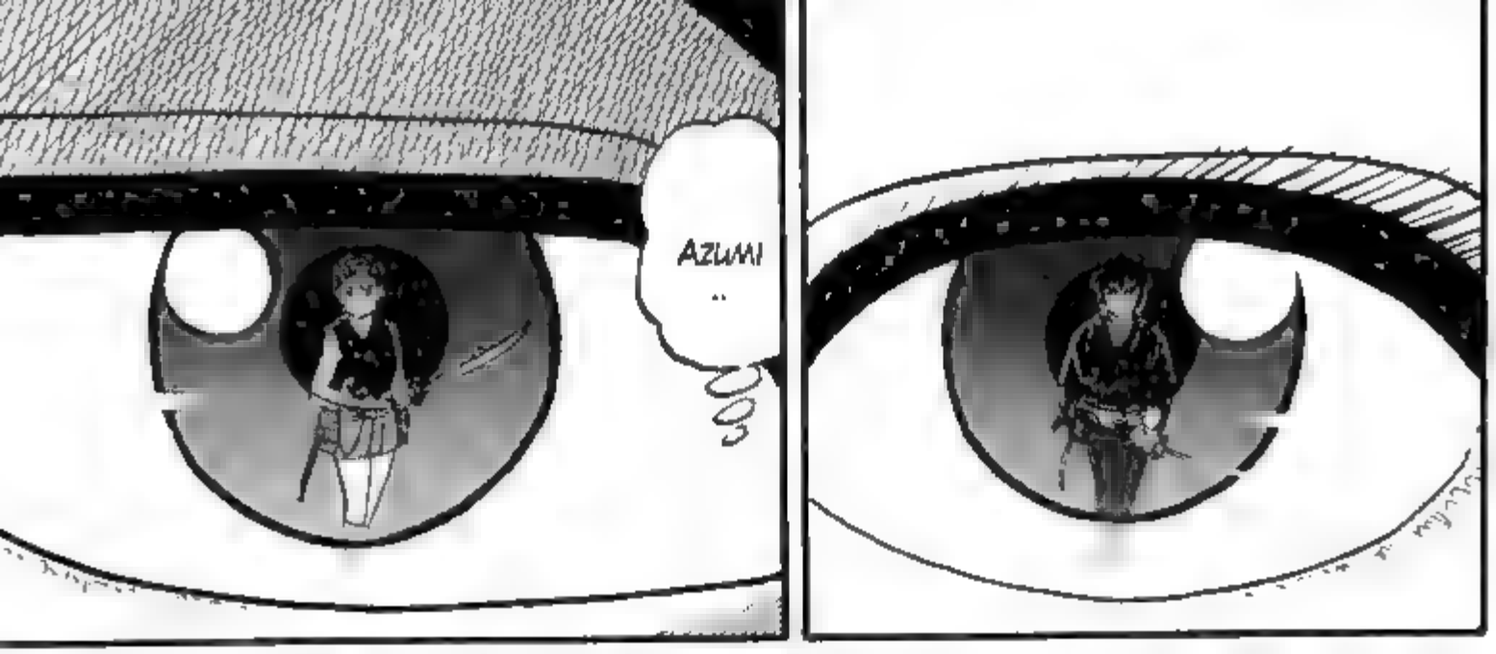
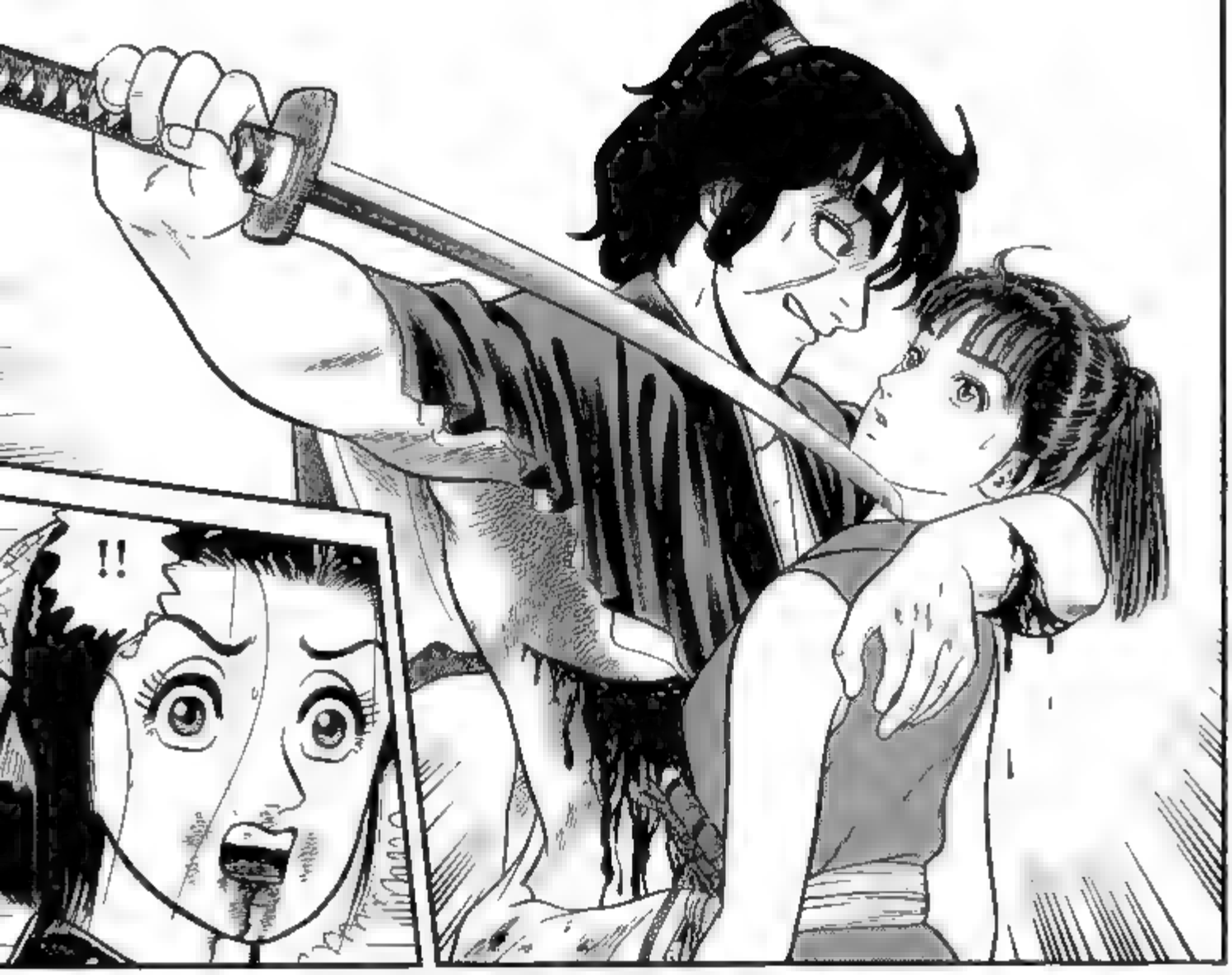

AZUMI...
AZUMI...




AZUMI
..

I BEG OF YOU!
PLEASE.

25
LISTEN TO ME, AZUMI!
I WON'T LET US BE SEPARATED!
LET'S DIE HERE TOGETHER!


!!

LET'S DIE TOGETHER, MY DEAR AZUMI.
I'LL TAKE YOU WITH ME!

TO-
GETHER
...
30
SAKON
...

CHAPTER 6: SNOW AND COMPANY

.....
IT'S OKAY.

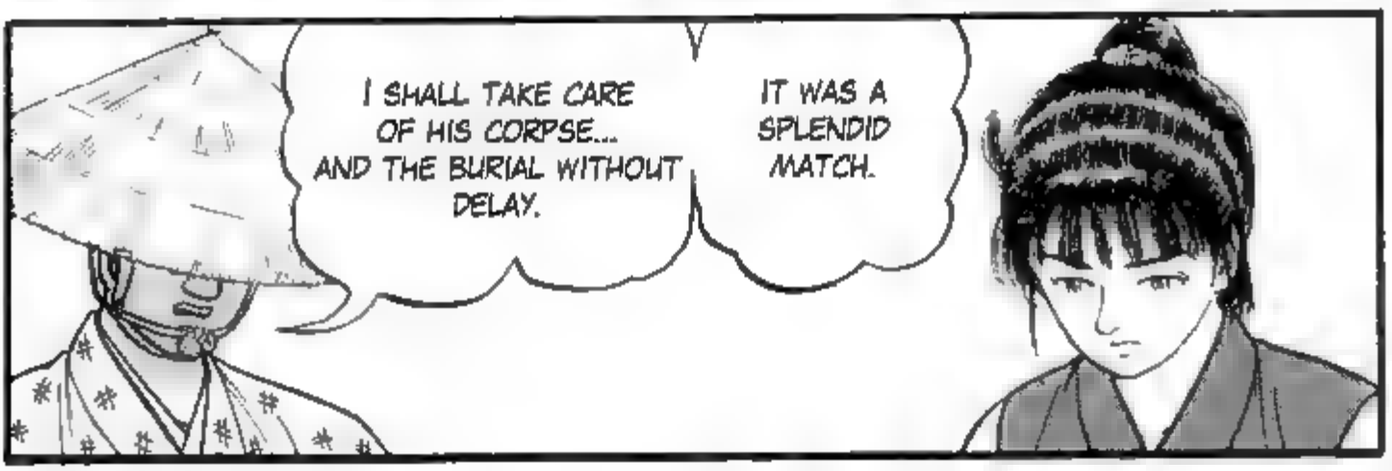
.....

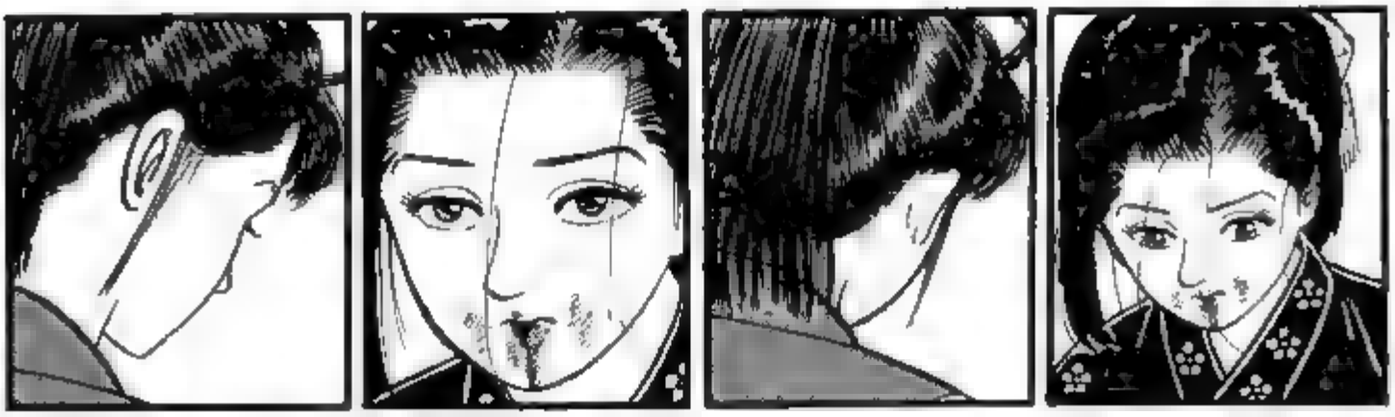
I'M HAPPY... AZUMI. .
!!.....

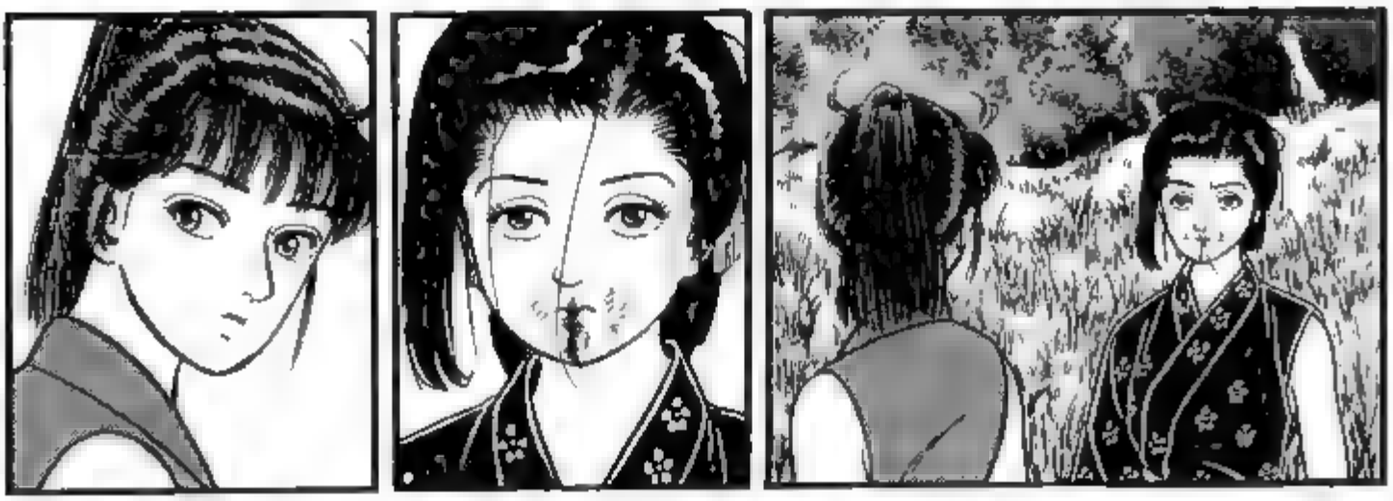
CO-
UGH!
UGH..
YOU..
ARE..

WONDER-
FUL!

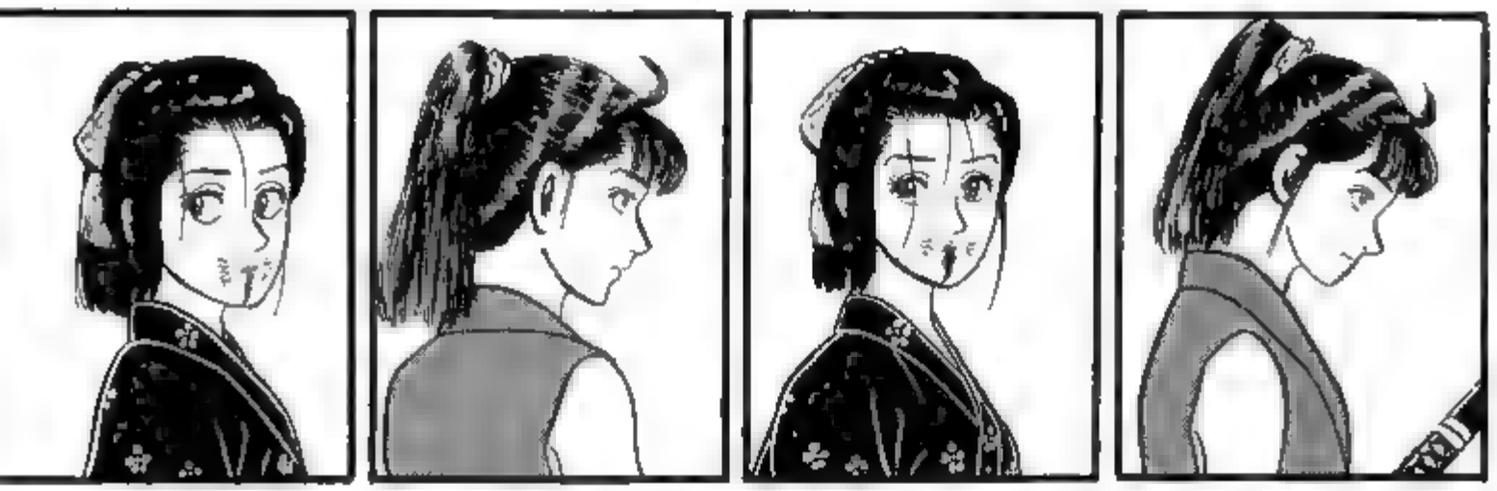
STOP!!!!
AZUMI-CHAN!!

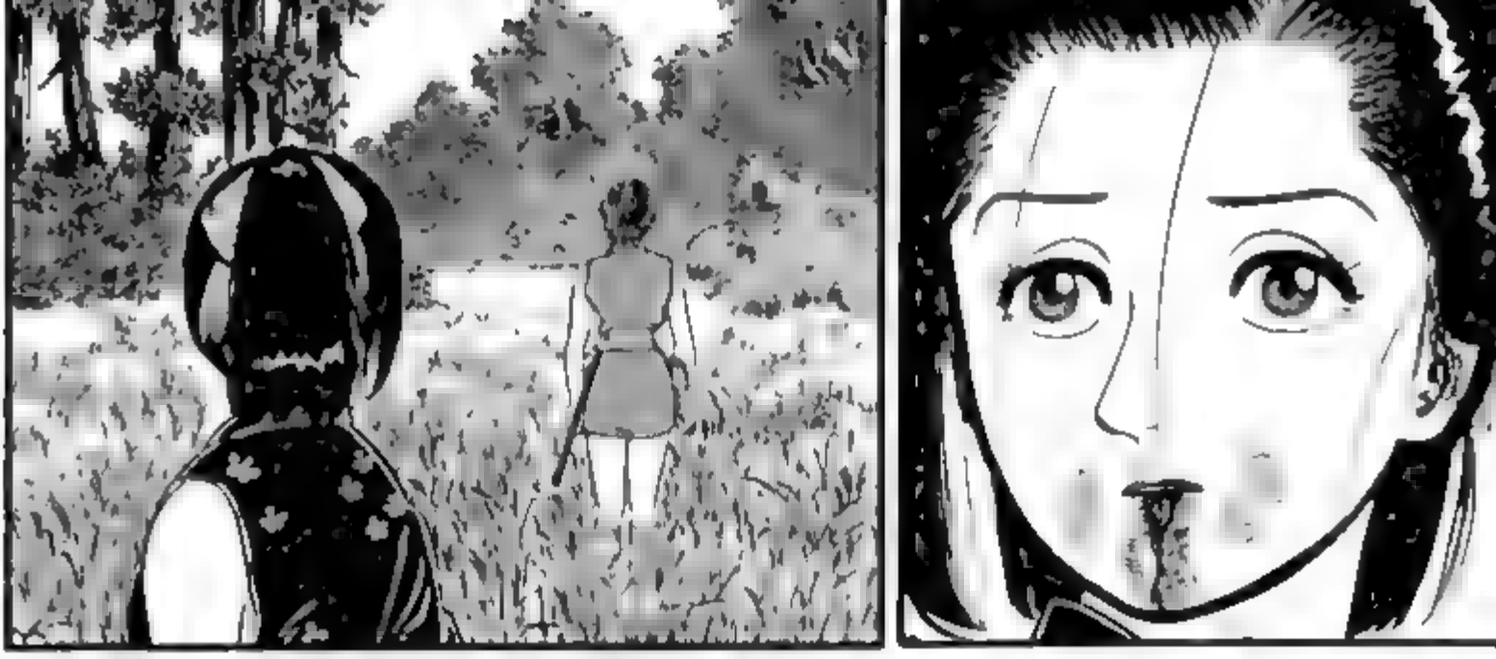

I SHALL TAKE CARE OF HIS CORPSE... AND THE BURIAL WITHOUT DELAY.
IT WAS A SPLENDID MATCH.

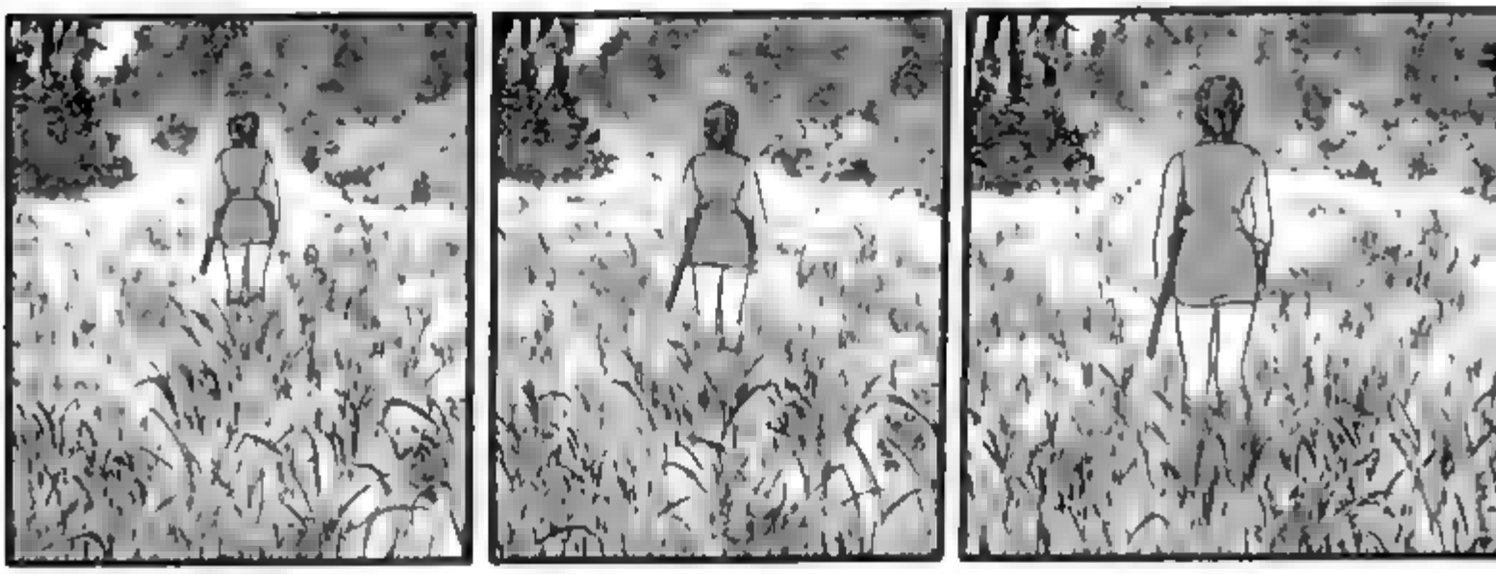


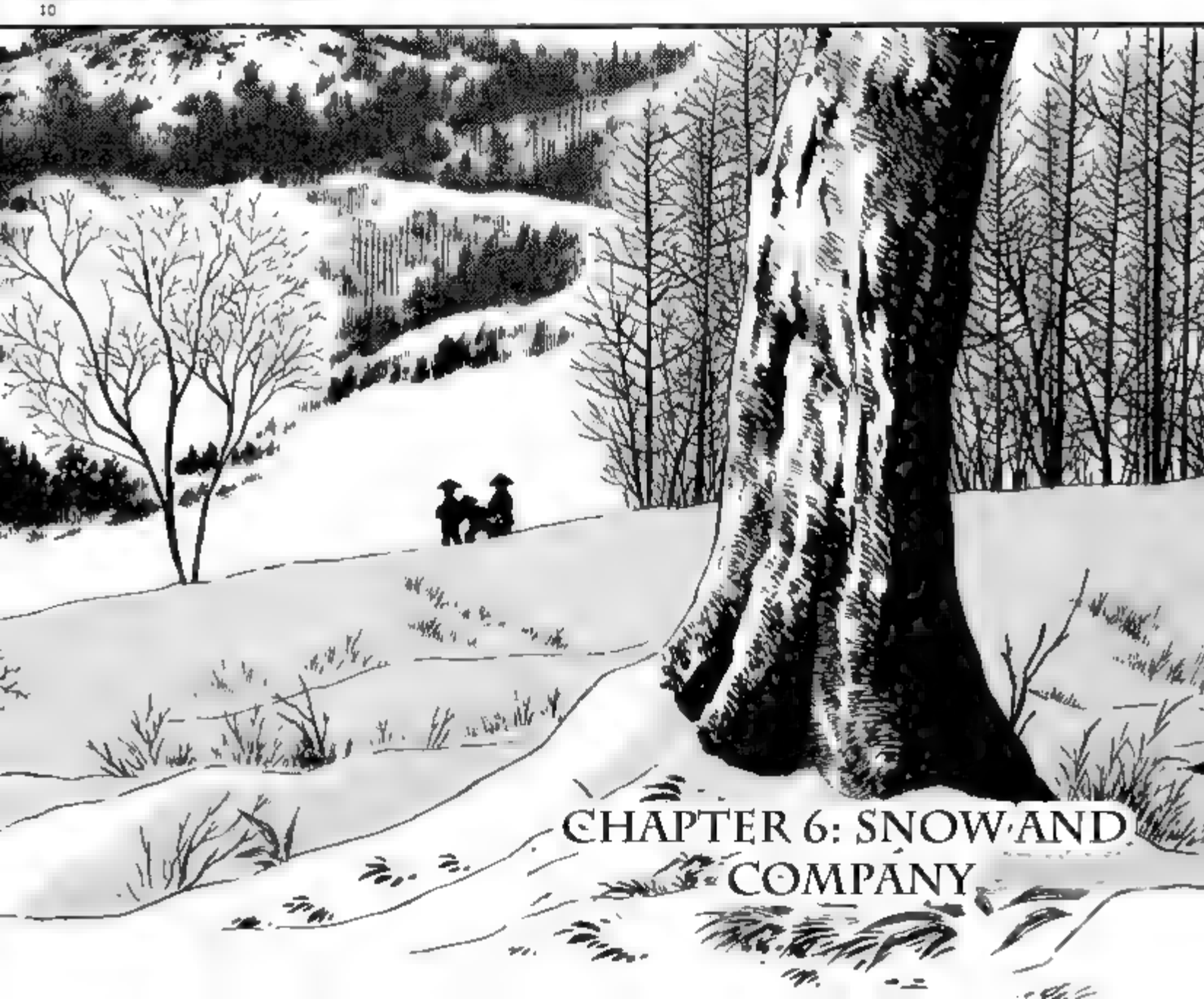


I'M SORRY, YAE-CHAN.









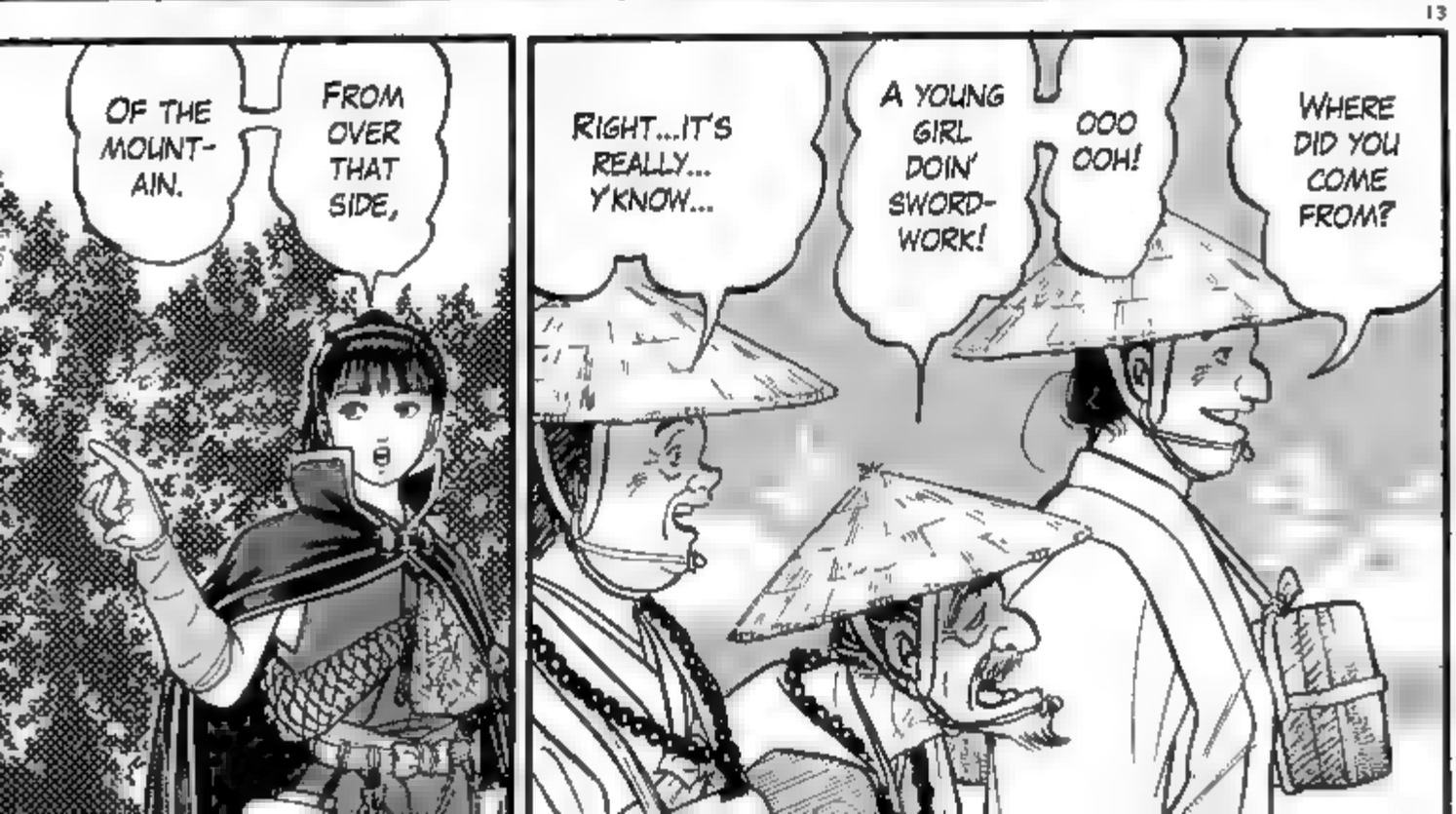
CHAPTER 6: SNOW AND COMPANY

MISS...

YES
...
ARE YOU TRAVELLING ALONE?

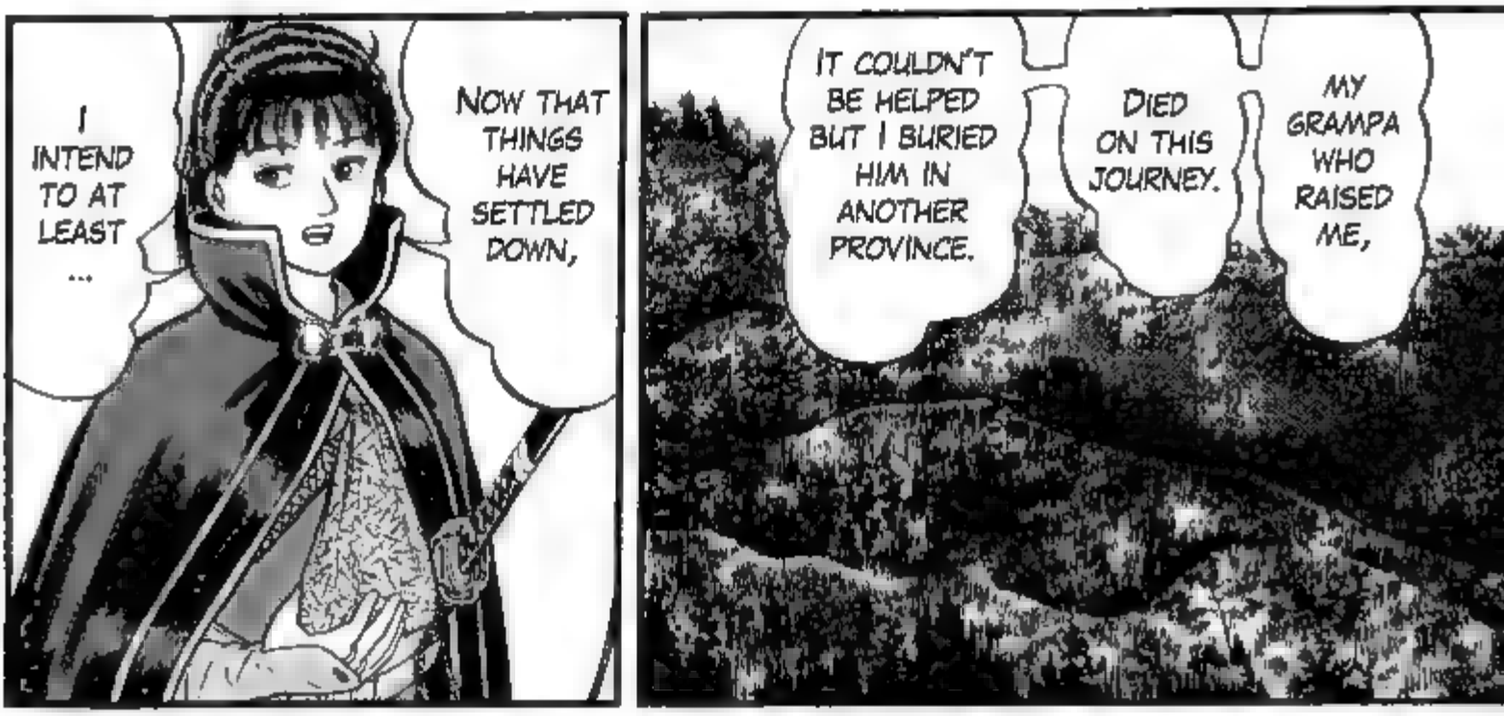
I GREW UP LEARNING THE SWORD.
.....
SHE SAYS SHE'S ON HER OWN!
AAAH?
ARE YOU A SAMURAI'S DAUGHTER?
YOU HAVE A KATANA.

SHE SAYS SHE'S LEARNED THE SWORD!
SHE'S WEARIN' A KATANA?
A KATANA.
DOING SWORD-PLAY?
A YOUNG GIRL...


FROM OVER THAT SIDE,
OF THE MOUNT-AIN.
RIGHT...IT'S REALLY... Y'KNOW...
A YOUNG GIRL DOIN' SWORD-WORK!
OOO OOH!
WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?

OOH.
A YOUNG LADY DOIN' SWORDPLAY, EH?

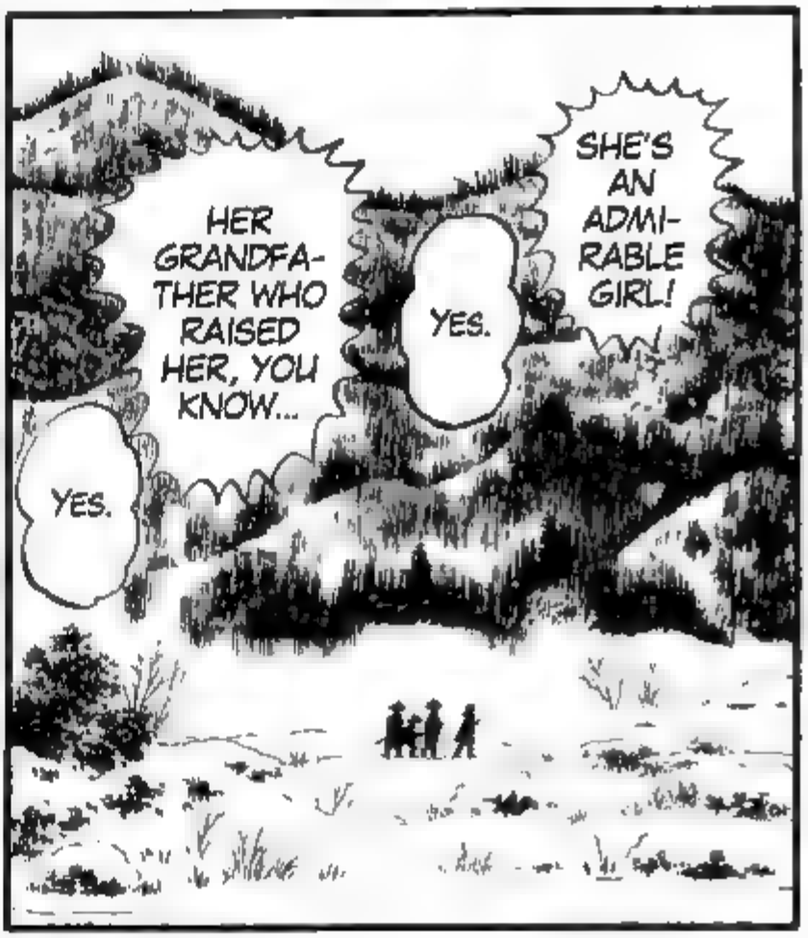
AN' JUST WHERE WOULD YA BE OFF TA?
WHERE'RE YOU OFF TO?


I INTEND TO AT LEAST ...
NOW THAT THINGS HAVE SETTLED DOWN,
IT COULDN'T BE HELPED BUT I BURIED HIM IN ANOTHER PROVINCE.
DIED ON THIS JOURNEY.
MY GRAMPA WHO RAISED ME,

...BRING HIS MORTUARY TABLET TO THE TEMPLE AT HIS HOME VILLAGE...

WHAT SHE SAY? AAH?
OH, MY!!!
DUTIFUL YOUNG GIRL.
SUCH A ...
MY, MY...

EEEH !!!
WHAT!! SHE'S SO DUTIFUL!
OOOH!


HER GRANDFA-THER WHO RAISED HER, YOU KNOW...
YES.
SHE'S AN ADMI-RABLE GIRL!
YES.

AND YOU? WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

SHE'S SO ADMIRABLE!
RIGHT!?
OOHH!

AMAZING!
THAT'S FAR!
ISE!?
WE FINALLY...FINALLY GOT PERMISSION...AND WE'RE ABLE TO GO VISIT ISE AS WE'VE LONGED TO.
EVEN IF THEY WERE TO DIE THERE AND NOT RETURN, THEY'D BE HAPPY!
THAT
THEY SAY
CAN GO VISIT ISE,
MOM AND DAD
YES!
IF...

IS IT NECESSARY TO HAVE PERMISSION EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE GOING TO VISIT ISE!?
YOU SAID YOU FINALLY GOT PERM-ISSION?
EHH...

AHH...
TO LEAVE THE DOMAIN, YOU HAVE TO BE STRICTLY EXAMINED, SO NOT GETTING PERMISSION ISN'T RARE.
WELL...
IS IT EASY TO GET PERMISSION IN YOURS?
I DUNNO ABOUT OTHER DOMAINS, BUT...

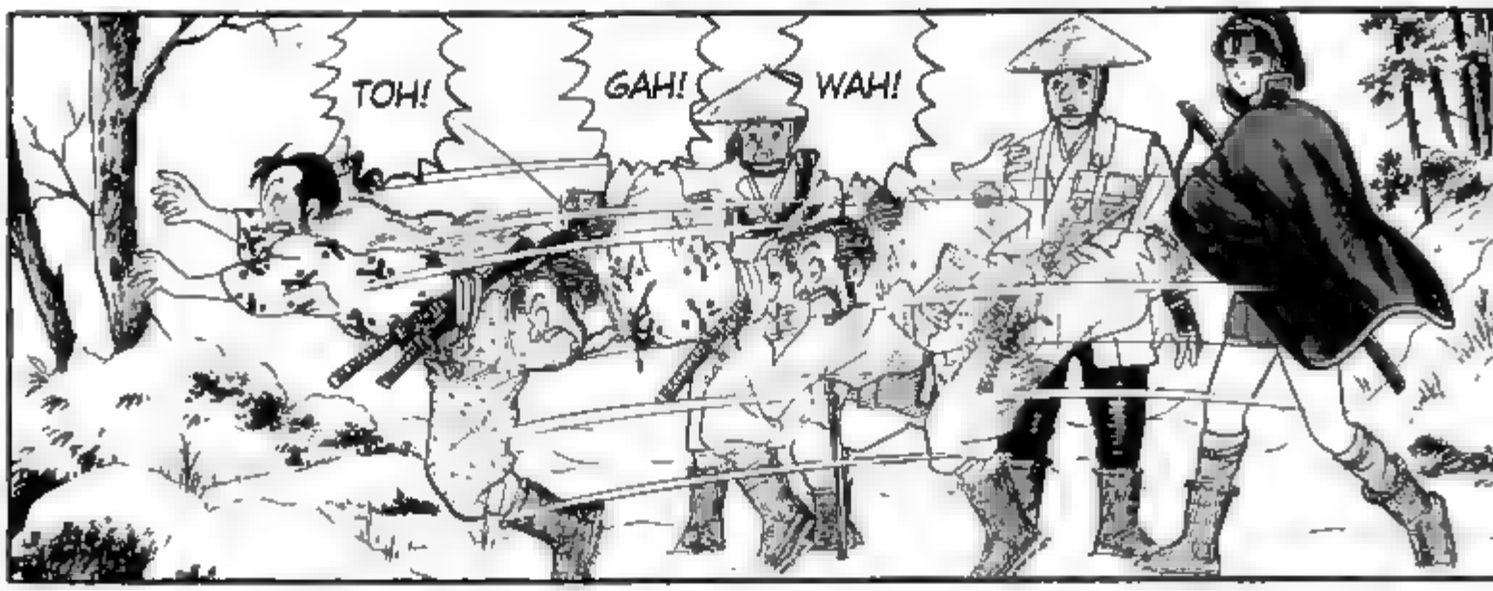
WHAT'D SHE SAY?
EHH?
WELL...THAT'S GOOD, THEN.
YES.
I SEE, I SEE!
OHH!
ISE!
GO AND VISIT
SHE SAYS SHE'S GLAD WE GOT LEAVE TO

EHE HEH HEH HAHA!

OHH, YA GOT NICE LEGS!

.....
.....

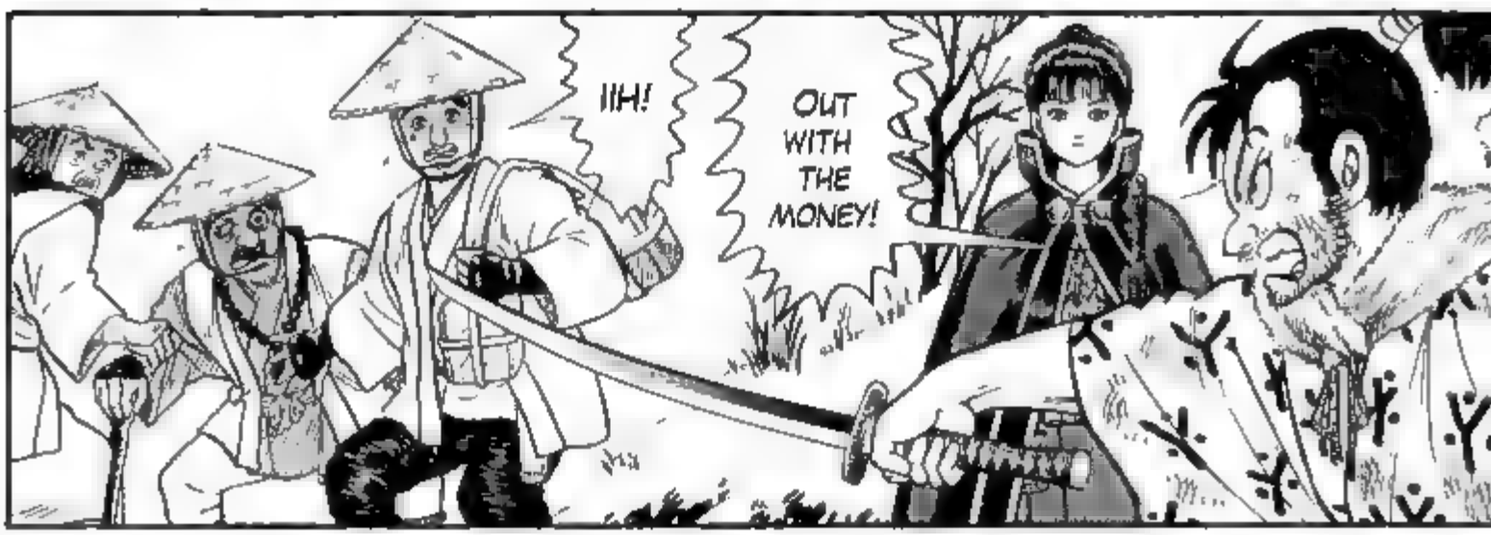
YOU TRYING TO SEDUCE ME!?


TOH!
GAH!
WAH!

DAMN YOOOU! YOU LAUGHED, DIDN'T YA!?
YOU'LL PAAAY!

YOU SEEM QUITE HUNGRY.

GIMME YOUR MONEY!
IF YA DO, I'LL LET IT GO THAT YA LAUGHED AT ME!


IIH!
OUT WITH THE MONEY!

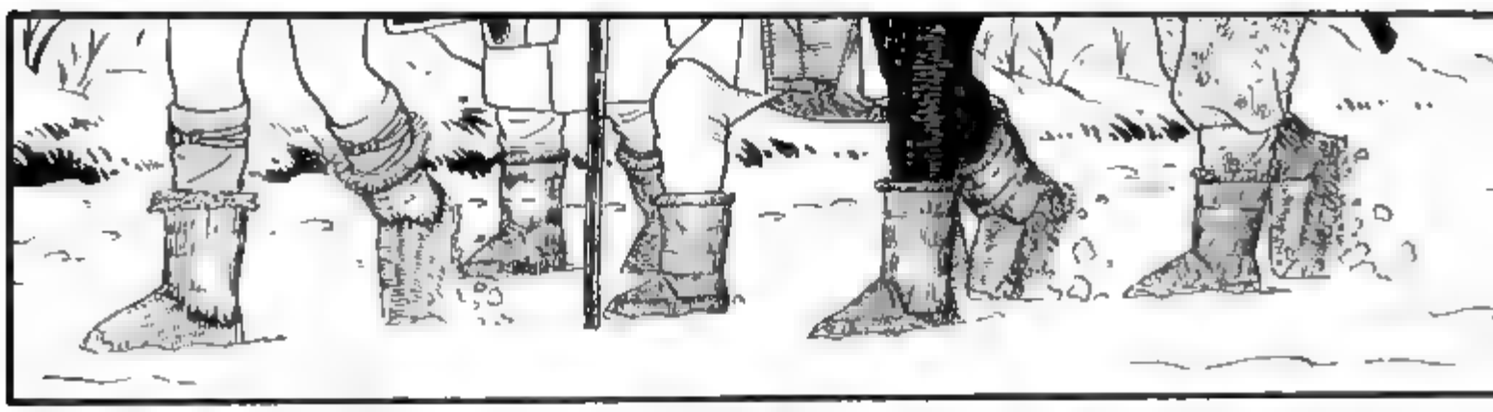
OUT WITH IT!

YOU'LL FORGIVE ME WITH THAT.
I'LL TREAT YOU TO A MEAL THAT WILL FILL YOU UP FOR THE DAY IN THAT POST TOWN.
.....

EHH...
EH...

.....
.....

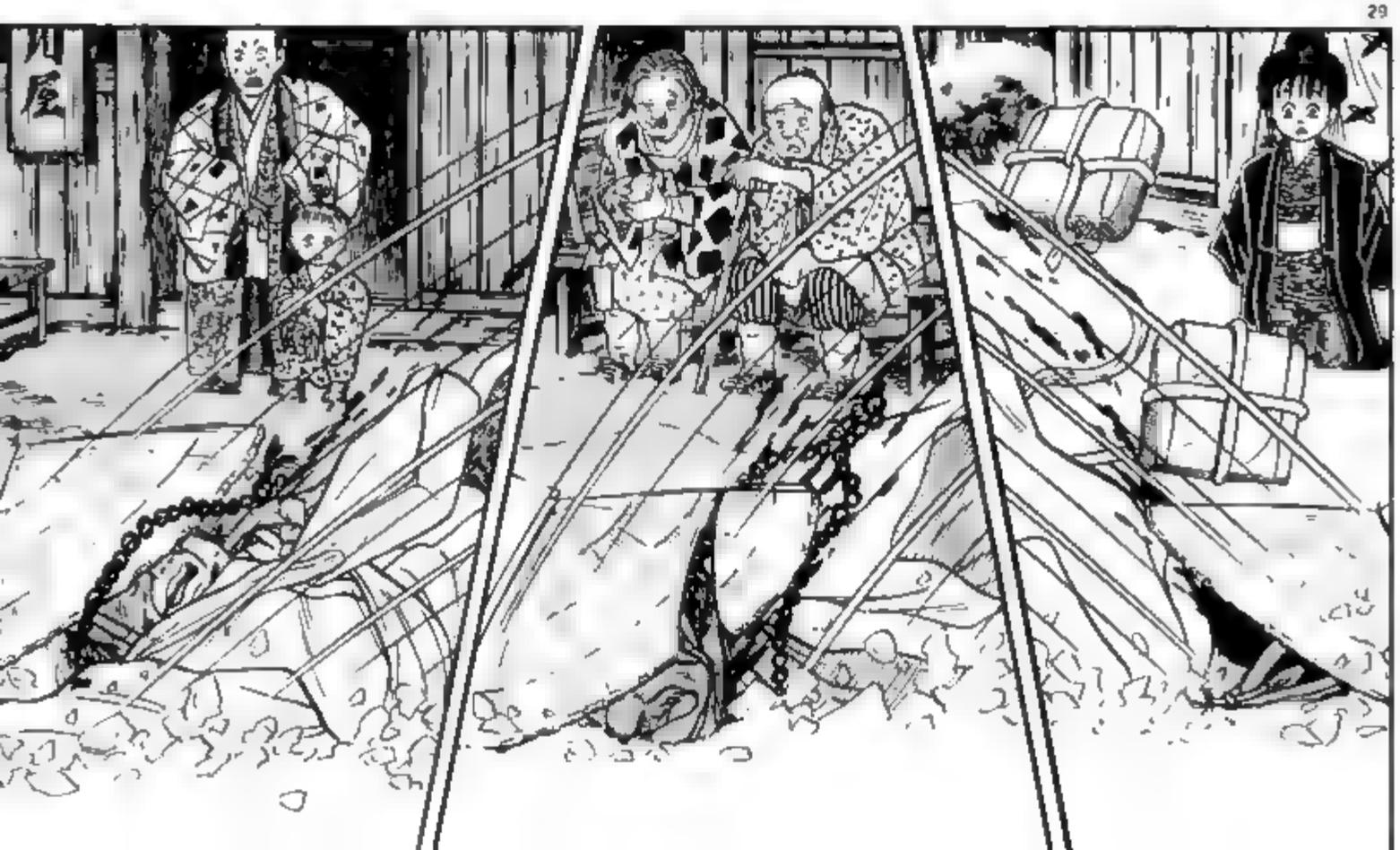
NOT A BANDIT!
I'M A SAMURAI, TOO!
AL-RIGHT!
YOU'RE AN ODD WOMAN.



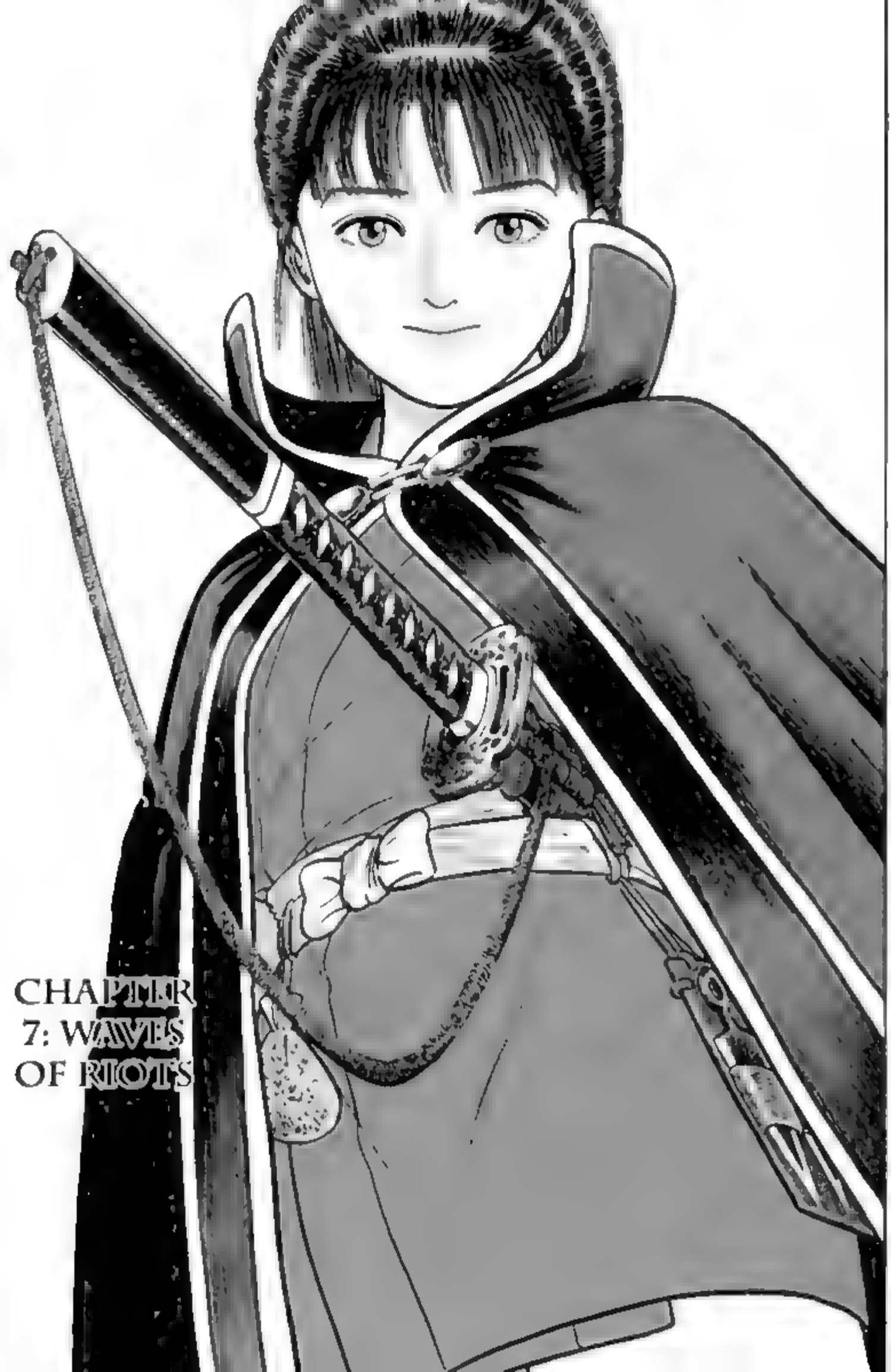
AIEEEEE!

29

28


川屋

30



CHAPTER 7: WAVES OF RIOTS

.....

!!
YOU'LL BE FINE IF THAT'S NOT COVERED IN POISON.
YOU SHOULD TREAT YOUR LEG QUICKLY

2

YES. A WATER CYLINDER.
THEY GAVE SOMETHING TO THIS MAN, RIGHT?
WAS I FOUND OUT?
I TOOK HIM A BIT TOO LIGHTLY...

I SEE.

I GUESS...
SEEMS IT WASN'T POISONED.

I'M TSUDZURA.
I AM AZUMI. NICE TO MEET YOU.

I WAS TOLD THAT A MAN PLAYING AT BEING A STARVING RŌNIN WOULD BE WAITING BEFORE THE POST TOWN...AND TO CONFIRM WITH EYE CONTACT IF HE WAS
A FELLOW TRAV-ELER
.....
ON MY END,
IS THAT SO?
THAT STUFF STANDS OUT TO MUCH!
I WAS INFORMED THAT YOU WERE A YOUNG GIRL WEARING A MANTLE AND A KATANA, BUT...

FAR AWAY FROM THE HIGHWAY, SURROUNDED BY MANY THICK MOUNTAINS AND SHUT OFF BY SNOW DURING THE HARSH WINTER...THIS COUNTRY...
IN THIS ERA, FIEFS WERE LIKE COUNTRIES, SO FOREIGN FIEFS WERE FOREIGN COUNTRIES.

THIS WAS
DUE TO THE PRESENCE OF A SECRET THAT THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE WAS NEVER SUPPOSED TO LEARN
...EXAMINED AND STRICTLY CHECKED THOSE WHO TRIED TO ENTER FROM A FOREIGN FIEF AND THOSE WHO TRIED TO EXIT FROM THE CURRENT ONE.

SO YOU'RE THE ONE.
OHHH!

BUT...
TO LEAVE EVERYTHING TO YOU!
TO ABSOLUTELY NOT JUDGE YOU BY YOUR APPEARANCE.
SAID TO GIVE YOU MY UTMOST TRUST.
THE SŌJŌ-SAMA
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO...?

I'LL WORK HARD TO BE USEFUL TO YOU.
.....
.....
.....

.....
.....
.....
.....

I'LL INTRODUCE YOU TO THE OTHERS!
COME.

I BARELY RECOGNIZE YOU, TSU-DZURA-DONO!

I ALREADY KNOW
I'LL BE COOPERATING WITH FOUR OTHERS FOR THE INFILITRATION.
SO THERE ARE THREE OTHERS AISDE FROM YOU, TSUDZURA-DONO.
YEP!
THEY TOO
HAVE GATHERED, KNOWING YOU WERE COMING!

LOOK.
THEY'RE VERY INTERESTED IN YOU, AND THEY'VE BEEN WAITING EAGERLY TO MEET YOU!
SO COLD!

YOU CAN CROSS OVER THAT BRIDGE.
GO RIGHT AHEAD.
SOME SNOW GOT IT!

YOU DIDN'T FALL FOR IT, EH?
ズボッ
I'M NOT USED TO SNOW, BUT I CAN TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PILED UP SNOW AND SNOW THAT WAS JUST PLACED THERE.

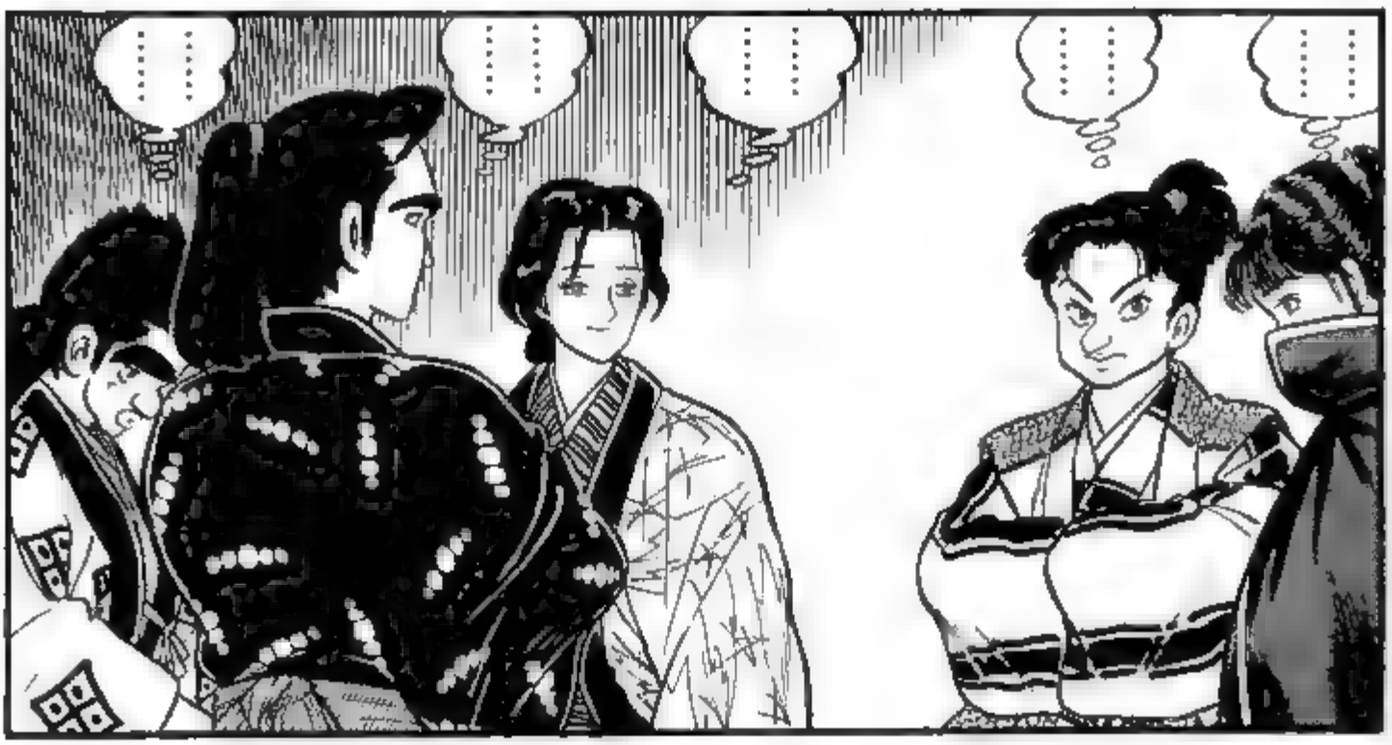
THAT WAS A FUNNY SORT OF WELCOME!
……
……
……

MY NAME IS AZUMI. NICE TO MEET YOU.

I'M KAGARI.
I'M UTSUBO.
I'M HATSUNE.

WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO RETURN FOR A WHILE.
BUT DUE TO OUR SINGULAR DUTIES,
WE'LL BE LIVING HERE FOR THE TIME BEING.

THAT'S RIGHT..
NOBODY WOULD NOTICE FOR QUITE SOME TIME...
IF WE DIE ALONE SOMEWHERE ELSE..



FOR A LONG TIME, THERE HAVE BEEN SPIES KNOWN AS "KUSA" PUTTING DOWN ROOTS AND SETTLING IN THESE LANDS...
YEAH!! AT THE POST TOWN I SAW WITH MY TWO OWN EYES THEM GIVING A LETTER TO THEIR COMRADE AND I KILLED HIM.
THEY WERE SPIES FOR THE SHOGUNATE, HUH?
SO...THAT FAMILY THAT KEPT APPLYING FOR PERMISSION TO VISIT ISE...

WHO THE HECK YOU ARE, OR
IF YOU'RE SO MUCH BETTER THAN US, BUT...
SEEMS TENKAI-SAMA HAS SERIOUS TRUST IN YOU... I HAVE NO CLUE
AZUMI, RIGHT?
BY THE WAY,
YES.

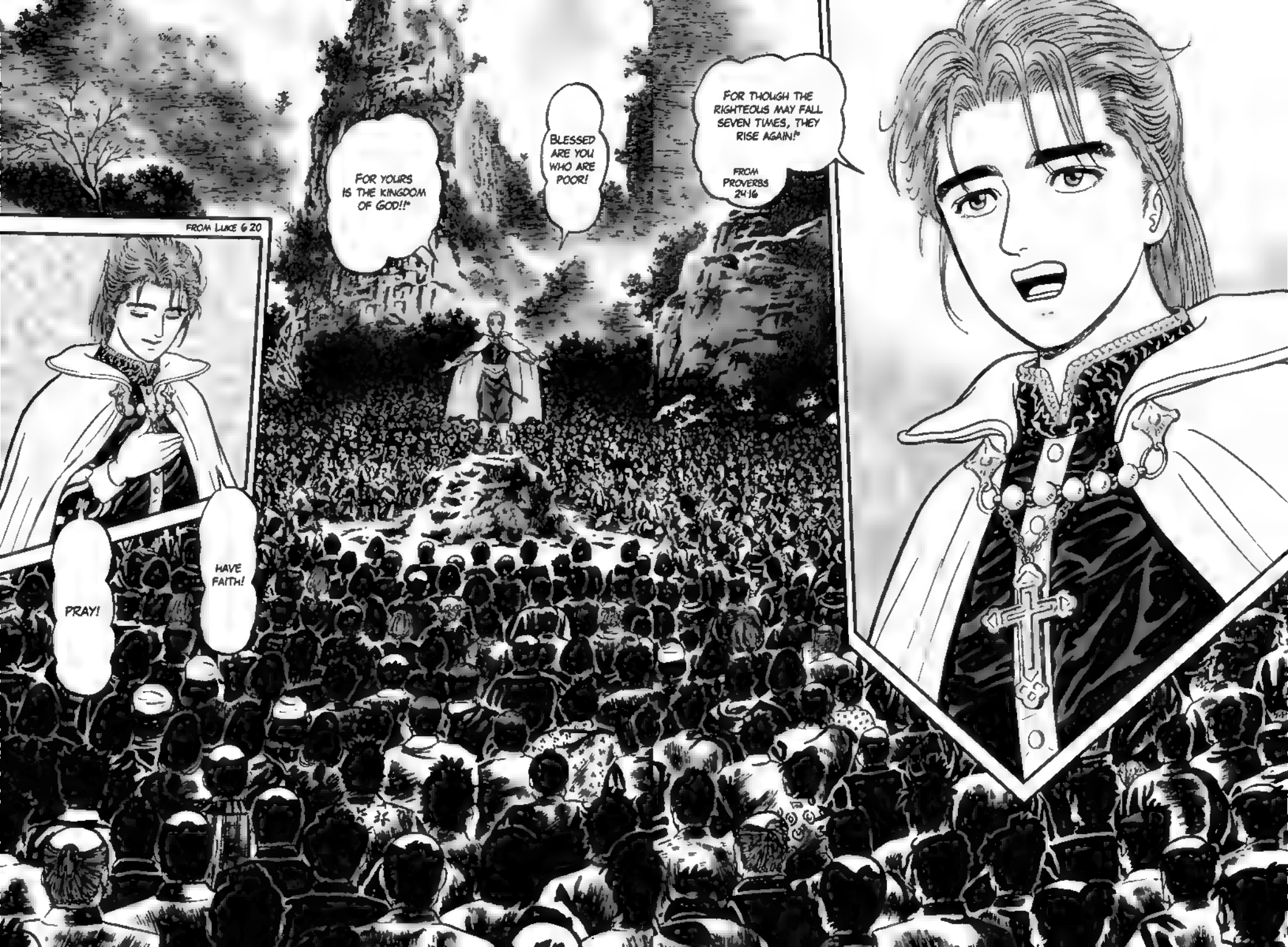
ALL ALONE.
I WONDER WHY YOU CAME TO JOIN US
NOW OF ALL TIMES

SOME SECRET ORDERS THAT NEED TO BE KEPT FROM US AS WELL?
WOULD YOU BY CHANCE HAVE

THEY SHOULD BE THE SAME AS YOURS.
MY ORDERS ARE TO PROTECT THE SECRET OF THIS FIEF UNTIL THE END AND NEVER TALK ABOUT IT.

IT'LL BECOME CLEAR SOONER OR LATER.
FORGET IT.

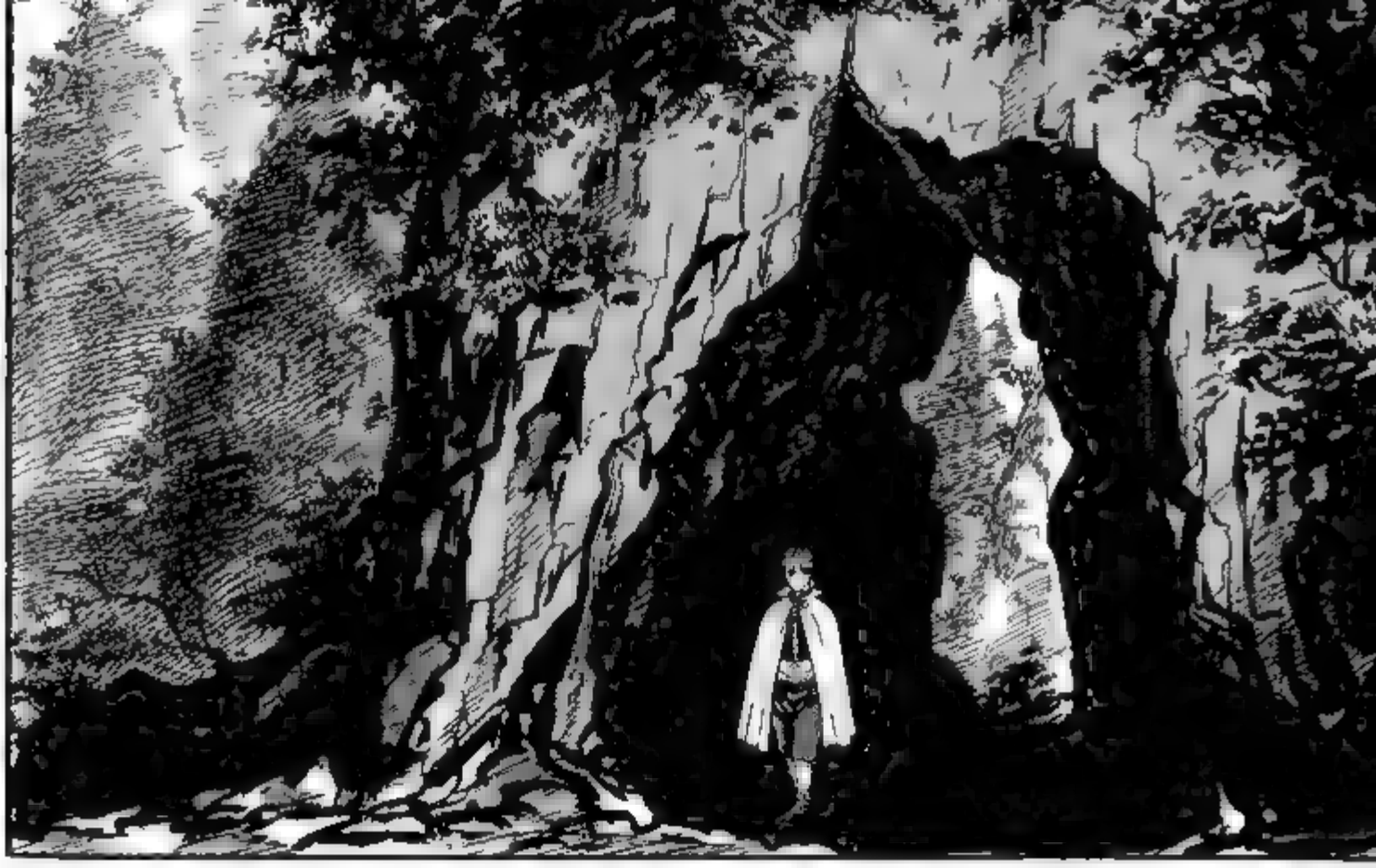
FROM JOHN 16.33

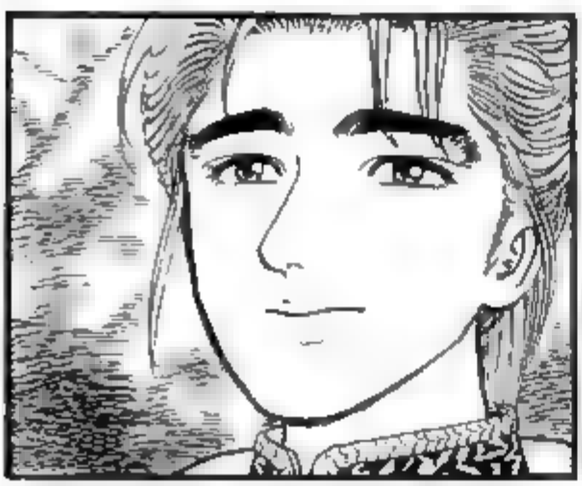

FROM LUKE 6 20
PRAY!
HAVE FAITH!
FOR YOURS IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD!!"
BLESSED ARE YOU WHO ARE POOR!
FOR THOUGH THE RIGHTEOUS MAY FALL SEVEN TIMES, THEY RISE AGAIN!"
FROM PROVERBS 24:16

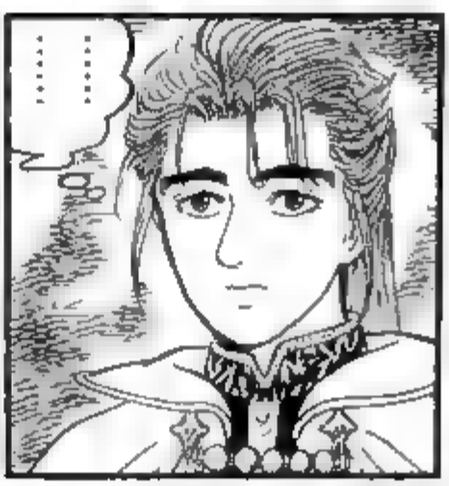
FROM CORINTHIANS 13:13

WELL THEN. I LEAVE THE REST IN YOUR CARE.

LEAVE IT TO US!
SIR!
SEE YOU.
GOOD NIGHT.
GOOD NIGHT



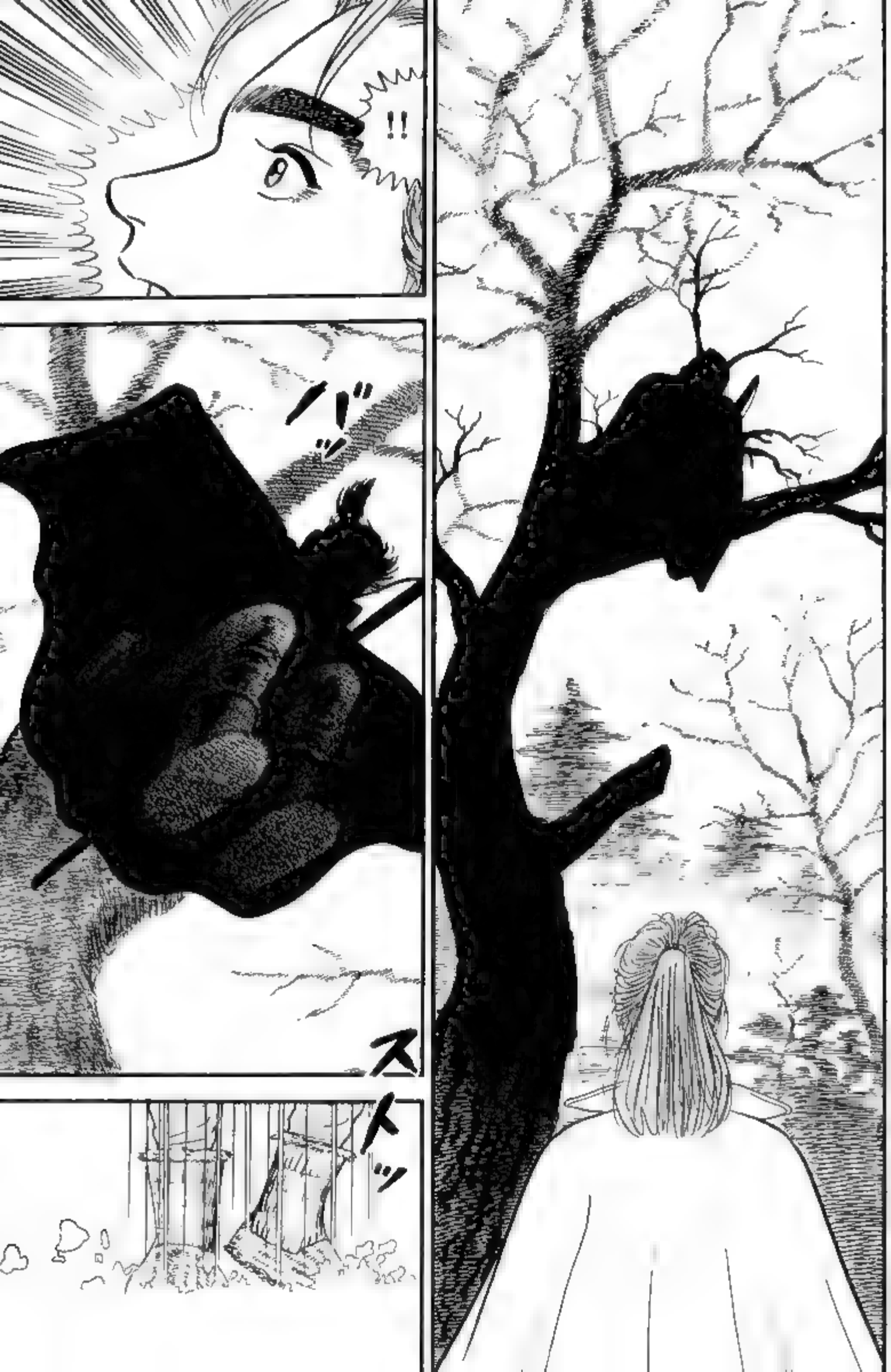



……

……

24

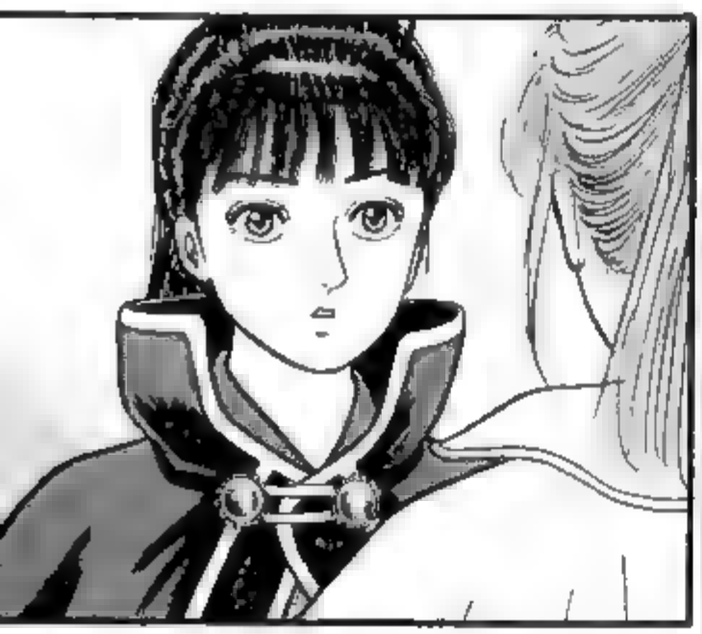
♪
whistle
ヒュ〜


!!
バ"
ス
ト"

ARE YOU KONISHI SHIZUNE?
!!……

.....
.....
HOW ...

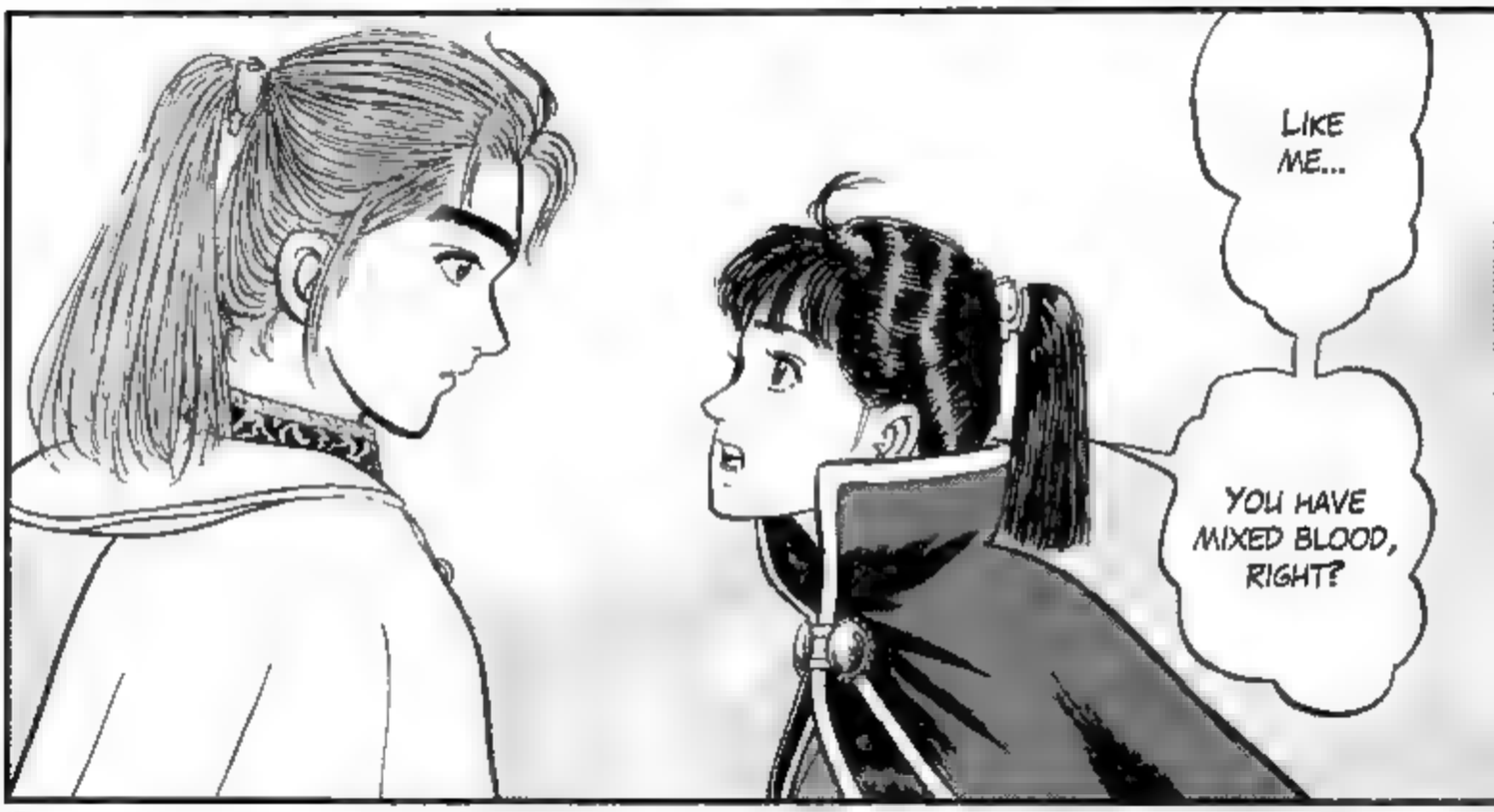
ARE YOU
EVEN HUMAN?



OR AN APPAR-ITION?

HOW DID YOU GET HERE?
NOONE
SHOULD BE ABLE TO COME HERE!

.....
MORE-OVER.
I'M SURP-RISED.
YOU'RE HANDSOME.


LIKE ME...
YOU HAVE MIXED BLOOD, RIGHT?

.....

.....
.....

ARE YOU?
JUST WHO ...
MY NAME IS AZUMI.
.....
AZUMI.
.....

BY CROSSING THAT BRIDGE!?
DID YOU COME HERE

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■18巻のあらすじ

京都で自分をかくまってくれた者達が、次々と傷つき斃れてゆくなか、あずみもそのことに深く傷つき、自分は死んだ方が良いのではないかと思い詰めるほどに生きる目的を見失いかけていた。そんな折、爺の師であり天下の実力者・南光坊天海があずみを保護することに!?　やえと左近との想い絡まる激情京都編の完結と、天海からの新たな使命を受けたあずみが雪国へと旅立つ新展開・雪国死闘編を収録!!